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# ALFRED THE GREAT

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England of Alfred the Great.

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# **Alfred The Great**

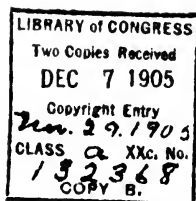
**BY**

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"Bright Days in Sunny Lands," etc.



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"Some lights there be within the Heavenly Spheres  
Yet unrevealed, the interspace so vast;  
So through the distance of a thousand years  
Alfred's full radiance shines on us at last."

—ALFRED AUSTIN.

# ALFRED THE GREAT

(849-901)

## CHAPTER I

### The England Before Alfred

**Preliminary Word.**—Great men, in the high sense of that term, do not become such by accident. They have that within them which impels them, constrains them, to great deeds. Their souls reach up and out for conquests. They find it no insuperable task to rise above the commonplace in endeavor, and to soar where others creep. Whether by superior genius or noble resolve such acquire genuine distinction by sheer force of character—never by chance. Let him believe in chance greatness who may; the verdict of a thinking world is that cause produces effect, and that the doers of the ages are those to whom Faith and Duty are the bugle-calls to achievement.

Certainly great men have been made such in part by environments and by friendships. But the truly lofty soul lives quite apart, and will suffer neither environments nor friendships to control its onward progress. It is headed toward eternal destinies. It catches the light-gleams, it feels the inward thrill, it pulsates to the matchless harmonies, of the century in which it lives. To it there can be no such word as failure. There may be delays and set-backs, but only death can put its seal on its earthly progress.

The life of Alfred the Great, who may be equally well described as Alfred the Good, is a shining example of what a splendidly brave and good man, of more than usual genius, born in the purple but raised under most adverse circumstances, may accomplish by plodding industry and fair talents joined to noble ideals. Nothing favored him in his earlier years except the royalty of his birth; nothing better became him in his later days than the modesty of his life and his scrupulous devotion to God and country. What a contrast to the usual manner of successful occupants of worldly thrones! Whether in distress or in success, in battle or in peace, in disguise or in royal apparel, in the hovel or on the throne, Alfred was always master of himself, always serene of spirit, always unselfish in behalf of the rights of his brother-men, always an example of what a pure-minded patriot and chosen leader should be to win the distinction of "Father of his Country." Every schoolboy has heard of him; every reader of history in every land and language knows the

story of his reign and time. The lessons from that story, like the affectionate regard of the English-speaking race for Alfred himself, will never die. Rich and poor; old and young; scholars, statesmen, law-givers, teachers; men of action and men of thought, and men who are given neither to action nor thought, know that England might not have been, or, had she come to be, that she would have been robbed of an immense Kohinoor from her diadem of greatness, had not Alfred possessed the remarkable self-poise, the clear head, the educated hand, the religious heart, in a word the notably grand moral character, that made him man as well as king.

Considering the age in which he lived; the density of the ignorance of law, literature and true morality among those whom he endeavored to raise to a higher level; the divisions among his countrymen as to language, customs, religion, and, still more, national ideals; the almost hopelessness of ever welding the ealdormen<sup>1</sup> of Wessex and the ealdormen of Mercia into a homogeneous nation; the bravery and numbers of his foes, the weakness of his own forces, and the fact that he had not the semblance of a navy with which to meet the pirates of the sea; and, when to these facts are added the want of a national literature, of schoolhouses and of teachers of youth, the absence of past national history, the deplorable morals of the masses, and the general poverty of his people: viewing all this it is amazing that Alfred's little kingdom survived, much less grew into greatness. All through that long onrush of Teu-

tonic hordes from the Continent of Europe, he not only held them in check, but eventually welded them into Englishmen!

"Why a great man," to quote M. Guizot, "comes at a particular epoch, and what force of his own he puts into the development of the world no one can say. This is the secret of Providence." It must always remain a mystery how Alfred of England and Washington of America came to be just when and what they were, but God knows, and that must suffice.

**Events During the Roman Occupation.**—The known history of England begins with the invasion of that, then far-away, island-country, by Julius Cæsar. Before his time all accounts of it are legendary and mystifying. It is doubtful if Cæsar would ever have heard any real facts about that land, much less have gone there to conquer it, had it not been for an unusual circumstance. He was busy with his conquest of Gaul, when he found that the Veneti, who lived in Brittany, in the west of present France, were great sailors. To overcome their navy, he built a fleet on the river Loire, and, when the Veneti heard of this they sent across the channel, to what is now Southern England, for succor. The Celts were there and they also had strong boats. So the two neighboring countries combined to defeat the fleet of Cæsar. It seems probable that Albion, as Cæsar called it, and Brittany, were both inhabited by much the same class of people, having similar language and religion. At all events, Cæsar seems not to have distinguished the



one from the other in his descriptions of them, except as to immaterial details. He says that both peoples were Druids, although, as we understand it to-day, the real Druids were an older stock, inhabiting Gaul and also Albion and Iverne (England and Ireland), and in Cæsar's day going into decline.<sup>2</sup>

The Celts of Albion were brave and free; they practiced many of the arts; they mined ore and smelted tin; they had swords, shields and chariots; and they had religious priests and certain good laws that were respected. They were not savages, although this view is contrary to the one formerly accepted. Perhaps Cæsar believed them savages because they disfigured themselves as such; he says they "painted themselves with a dye."<sup>3</sup>

The result of the first navy conflict was that Cæsar conquered the Veneti, and then, in vengeance, as well as to satisfy his curiosity and ambition, he took his fleet over to Albion, to make a punitive tour of that island. The Celts never dreamed of such a result to follow their fraternal assistance to the Veneti; but the invasion came, nevertheless. In the year 55 B. C., Cæsar sailed from the chalk cliffs of France—from some port between the present cities of Calais and Boulogne—and made a landing on the English coast between Walmer and Sandwich. He had ten thousand Roman soldiers. The beach was crowded with armed men, who had horses and chariots, but Roman discipline was, of necessity, triumphant. Who could stand up in that day and defeat Cæsar!

It is an interesting story of how Cæsar went to Canterbury, crossed the Thames, penetrated to St. Albans, and then returned to Gaul. He did not subdue the country, but he made his name and that of the Roman legions known and feared wherever they went.

Almost a hundred years later the Romans, in the time of Claudius, again reached Albion, and this time they became its masters. Vespasian was the general who accomplished the subjugation (A. D. 45-50) of the southern half of the country, including Wales. Agricola, twenty-nine years later (A. D. 79) completed the conquest, in the days of Nero. Then the Roman eagle had sway as far north as the Forth and the Clyde in Scotland. For three hundred and thirty-nine years the Romans were complete rulers in Britain, as it now came to be called, and then left it forever, (in 418).

It was a long time in which to make a lasting impression, but, singularly enough, they left it much as they found it, with a people at once ready to resume their independence; a people who had adhered to their language and customs through all those centuries; a people divided as before into tribes, and in about the same condition of semi-civilization as when Julius Cæsar first gazed at them from the decks of a ship off the Sandwich beach. During that Roman period Christianity had taken root in Rome and in all her colonies and Britain was not a stranger to it. But, when the Roman legions left, the island relapsed into paganism, and until the coming of the missionaries

of Pope Gregory (597), there was a space of one hundred and eighty years when it was just as much of a heathen land as it had been in the time of the Druids.

**Britain's Early Name.**—It is interesting to know what terms were used in speaking of the land of the Celts in the earliest days, because the modern name England was unknown until about a hundred years before the time of Alfred. By all earliest classical writers who allude to them England and Scotland were called Albion, and Ireland was known as Hibernia or Ierne, (Iverne). Aristotle (B. C. 384-322) distinctly calls them Albion and Ierne. Cæsar speaks of the country as Albion, although he gives to the people inhabiting it the name of Britanni (as Pliny does after him). Occasionally he refers to the country as Britannia. Cicero (B. C. 106-'43), whose brother accompanied Cæsar on his journey to Albion, more freely used the term Britannia. It came later to be the Roman name. Britannia had also been used, as we now know by the earlier Greeks.<sup>4</sup> Herodotus (B. C. 484-424) alludes to it. Ptolemy (Second Century A. D.) was the first to call England and Scotland, *Great Britain*, and Ireland, *Little Britain*. He says there were fifty-two different tribes there and he enumerates them.

**Who Were the Celts?**—Who were these early people? The designation of them has always been Celts, although subdivided into Scots (in Ireland), Picts (in Scotland), and Celts (in Britain proper). The Celts were not indigenous to Great Britain. They were a people who had

sprung up upon the Continent of Europe, and were a mixture of the Eastern and of the Teutonic races. Their real home before going to Britain was in Gaul, so that Cæsar was not far from right when he set down the inhabitants of both sides of the Channel as one people. The Celts got to England, we know not how, and they probably found an earlier race there, which, whether Druids or not, was disappearing, if, indeed, it had not then vanished. Centuries may have elapsed while the Celts were overspreading the two islands, and, when the Romans came, and later, the Angles and Saxons, they still held on to language and customs with strange tenacity. The last expiring ray of the original Celtic as a spoken language, known finally as the Cornish tongue, was in Cornwall a little more than a century and a half ago.<sup>5</sup>

So the Britons—as the term is usually written by the historians—of the early centuries before and after Christ, were Celts, from the continent of Europe, and were in previous ages of the same blood as those who, in various countries, both in Asia and Europe, had become great peoples, led by crafty and daring leaders. They were not Huns, nor Tartars; not barbarians, nor savages; they were men groping after light, strong of heart and brave of hand, endeavoring to work out problems of civilization in their own way. They did not accomplish it alone, nor did the Romans greatly assist them. When their blood intermingled anew with their cousins of the farther north across the sea—the Angles and the Saxons, and

then, finally, the Normans—they made one of the grandest and noblest nations the world has ever seen.

**England After the Roman Era.**—From the time the Romans went away, Britain was not left alone a single century in which to work out in peace her own destiny. The Celts had scarcely time to consider how they might best cement themselves into a nation from a patchwork of various factions and municipal divisions, before the Picts of Scotland and the Scots of Ireland, who had generally maintained their independence during the Roman rule, pounced down upon them. These two nations were also Celtic, it is supposed, but, as they had not been Christianized even outwardly through their Roman neighbors, they had continued in a frame of mind to plunder. The Britain-Celts, on the contrary, had been taught at least some of the peaceful doctrines of the Cross, and, perhaps, would not have begun any warfare on Picts or Scots.

In their dilemma, the Celts, whom from this time on we shall designate as Britons, sent to Germany for assistance. They implored its absolutely heathen people to come and aid them. Whether the invitation went first to the Saxons or to the Angles, they both arrived at nearly the same time, ostensibly to assist the Britons in their defense, but, practically, to stay as possessors of the land.

The Angles were from the border-land between present Germany and Denmark; the Lowlands, near the mouths of the Elbe and the Weser. On

their arrival, as soon as the Picts and Scots were subdued, they settled in Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambria. The Saxons came from what is known as the Duchy of Holstein, and settled in Sussex. There were also the Jutes, who may, in fact, have been the first arrivals. They came from north of the Angles, from what is present Denmark, (their country is still known as Jutland), and occupied Kent and the Isle of Wight. The Jutes did not come in sufficient numbers to make them formidable rivals to the Britons, but the Angles and Saxons came over by thousands.

There was such a close resemblance between the Angles and the Saxons that the Celts never distinguished between them, but called them alike Saxons. The Angles, however, took up most of the territory; so much, indeed, in the middle, eastern and northeastern England (say more than one-third of all Britain, excluding Wales), that they eventually gave their name to the country—Angle-land, which was corrupted into *England*. The Saxons settled chiefly in southern England, excepting, however, Kent, where the Jutes had a foothold.<sup>6</sup>

The interesting historical fact, therefore, is, that these foreign races came to England, not for purposes of conquest but by invitation, and came to assist the Britons in subduing the Picts and Scots; that they remained after accomplishing that purpose, and fought against the Britons themselves; and that eventually all of them together formed the nation of England as it was in the

days of Alfred, and, with the addition of Norman blood, as it is to-day.

The Britons learned to hate these foreigners, but could not dislodge them, and, side by side, amid interminable controversies, fights and bloodshed, they lived for four hundred years, or until Alfred the Great began the work of merging them into one final and great kingdom, which, while not finished in his day, was accomplished but a short time later.

**Alfred's Ancestors.**—Alfred the Great was not a Briton of Celtic stock but a Saxon. He came from the blood of Fifth Century invaders. It seems almost a pity that he could not have been a real Celt, a Briton pure and simple, and thus have proved to the world that out of the more original native character a man could spring up to become a full-fledged leader of men, so burning with intense heroism and patriotic zeal as to hurl to right and left all invaders upon his country's soil. But such was not to be. In fact, we can now see that it were better not to have been so; because Alfred as a Celt would have been a pagan; as a Saxon, succeeding a line of ancestry consecrated by the piety of Augustine and his followers to Christianity, he ascended the throne with a full knowledge of his responsibility to Almighty God, the source of all real individual strength and all true national hope.

Cerdic and Cynric, two ealdormen of Saxon blood, came into the country with a body of fellow-Saxons in 495. They landed upon the south coast and founded a settlement in present Hamp-

shire. This settlement grew into Westsaxe (the west place of the Saxons), which, later, was softened into Wessex. Wessex, in a quarter of a century, was strong enough to form a kingdom, and Cerdic became king (about 520), his son, Cynric, succeeding him (534). They were the ancestors of Alfred.

These were not the only Saxons who put their feet on English soil; there were others in Sussex and elsewhere, who came earlier and also later; but with these we have most to do in the history of Alfred, because he was of them, and he raised the Wessex kingdom to the height of the English throne.

**Chief Dates of Four Centuries.**—We need not here recite in detail the history of the next four hundred years, from the time of the arrival of Cerdic and Cynric to Alfred's day. In this connection it is to be noted that English historians are far from agreed on many of the dates, so that while those below are approximately correct, not all of them are certainly so.

500-537. King Arthur is supposed to have been king of the Britons, ruling in the region of Cornwall; if so, he was the last of the great Celtic chiefs. He is the one about whom so much legend and romance gathered in after-centuries. He was, doubtless, a real man, but the legends of him may be myths. The Saxons fought him and were beaten; he was subsequently slain in the battle of Camlan, in Cornwall, somewhere about 530-537, the exact date being unknown. He was



buried at Glastonbury, where his remains were found in the time of Henry II. (1133-'89).

520-534. Cerdic was king of the Saxons.

534-560. Cynric, his son, was king, his dominions extending as far north as Bedford. As he had a clear title to the Wessex throne, and as the royal descent from him was for a long period of time unbroken, he furnishes the true "head" of the royal line of the English sovereigns.

560-616. Ethelbert, of Kent, was king, and Wessex was for a time only a subordinate part of the kingdom. In 568 Ethelbert was defeated in an engagement with the Wessex men, who took Sussex from him, but he continued to rule in Kent. In 570 the West Saxons got possession of Oxfordshire and Berkshire, so that they began to grow again into importance. In the time of Ethelbert, Augustine and his monks came (597), sent by Pope Gregory I. (542-604) of Rome, and Ethelbert was converted. Soon after most of the Saxons professed the new religion. He promulgated a code of laws that lasted to a greater or less degree to Alfred's time and afterward. In 601 Pope Gregory sent Paulinus as missionary to England, under whose preaching Edwin, king of the Northumbrians, was baptised. It was during Ethelbert's lifetime that the Angles and other Teutonic races became actual settlers everywhere from the river Severn to the German ocean, and from the English Channel to the Frith of Forth. Only Wales, which extended northerly to Chester, and southerly to and including Cornwall and

Devonshire, remained in the hands of the original Britons.

687. At this date the Christian religion was firmly established everywhere in what later became England. The kings had been converted, one by one, from paganism, and the people followed their lords; monasteries sprang up and flourished.

694. The West Saxons obtained possession of Kent, and continued thereafter as leading rulers in Britain.

740. King Ethelbald, of Mercia, styled himself "King of England."

787. The Danes and Northmen first landed on the eastern and southern coast for purposes of plunder, not of conquest.

794. The Danes defeated the Saxons at Wearmouth.

802-839. Egbert (Ecgerht) was king of the West Saxons. In 827 he conquered Mercia to the north of the Thames, and so virtually became King of England, styling himself such in a General Council held at Winchester in 829. To a certain extent he brought all the kingdoms of England, except Wales, together. In 833 the Danes and Northmen landed in thirty-six vessels and defeated Egbert in Wessex. In 836 Egbert fought them again in Cornwall (to which point the Danes had come from Ireland), and defeated them.

839. Ethelwulf succeeded Egbert.

851. The Danes arrived again at the mouth of the Thames with three hundred and fifty ships

and took Canterbury and London. This was when Alfred, son of Ethelwulf, was two years of age.

**Situation at Alfred's Birth.**—The situation, then, when Alfred was born, and when his father, Ethelwulf, was on the throne as the West Saxon king, was this: The kingdom of Wessex had had its ups and downs: it had grown great and then lost prestige; it had ruled and been ruled; it had been overrun by King Arthur and had slain him; it had overcome the adjoining kingdoms for a time and seen them disintegrate but not pass away; and finally, it was left wholly alone to fight against the greatest foes that ever came to the English shores, after the Romans—the Teutons and the Danes. Decade after decade, century after century, the men of Wessex were routed but never subdued, and they alone, when all their brethren among the other Saxons and Angles gave way before the mighty invasion from Scandinavia, had the courage, the character, the patriotism to fight and win, to fight and lose, and to fight again their invaders, until at last, under Alfred, they won a complete victory for their country. Brave old fellows, grim, untutored warriors, who looked not more to their own hearthstones than to the future of their children and to the land of their adoption, the world has never given them sufficient credit for saving, nay, for *making* England!

## CHAPTER II

## Alfred in His Youth

**Birth of Alfred.**—Alfred was the youngest son of Ethelwulf (or Æthelwulf),<sup>8</sup> king of the West Saxons, and was born at Wantage, in Berkshire, probably in the year 849.<sup>9</sup> A monument to him now stands in the marketplace of that town, erected only twenty-eight years ago. The location is in the midst of a rolling country, delightfully quiet, abounding in pastoral scenery, still, as always, in summer a centre for gallants who seek pure air and exhilarating sports. The district is known as the Vale of the White Horse, and it has remarkable richness of soil for grain and for pasturage of herds. In the Ninth Century ample forests were there, and pure and wholesome water could be found in abundance. One who visits it, to-day, will scarcely wonder that in Wantage Ethelwulf, the king, made a habitation for his family, for there is no better inland site in all England, not even in Winchester itself, which Alfred made his own capital in later years.

Wantage was not Ethelwulf's only abode; he had another royal house at Chippenham, where his only daughter, Ethelflæda, was married to Ethelred, King of Mercia, (the district in the centre of Britain, adjoining Wessex on the north). This marriage connected the Saxons and the Angles by a new tie. Perhaps Ethelwulf had other residences, for, while kings of Britain in that day were primitive in many ways, they loved hunting, hawking and fishing, as well as fighting, and

they chose out large estates in places best suited to those purposes. Alfred was born in the winter, and probably in a one-storied house, made of stout English oak clamped with irons, as the custom was.

When Alfred was born the kingdom of Wessex, which then included within its sphere of influence the whole of Sussex and also Kent (the Jutes having been brought into the dominion), extended from present Exeter in the west to near Canterbury on the east, and from the river Thames to the southern coast, including the Isle of Wight. Roughly speaking these counties comprised Ethelwulf's country: Dorset, Hants, Sussex, Kent, Somerset, Wilts, Berks, Surrey, and a slight portion of Devonshire. London was on the north side of the Thames in Mercia; it was, therefore, an alien city, small but growing. Wessex extended about two hundred and twenty-five miles east and west, and had an average width of not over sixty miles north and south. It comprised about one-fifth of present England. As the Angles, who were the allies of the Saxons, had far less grit than they, and no great king, nor general, for leader, the Saxons had practically to meet the Danish hordes single-handed, while at the same time the larger nation of Angles went to pieces before their foes.

**Ethelwulf's Family.**—Ethelwulf, who reigned for nineteen years (839-'59), had four sons, beside the one daughter just named. His wife was Osburga, a daughter of his cup-bearer, of the race of Cerdic, the same king from whom Ethelwulf

was descended. She was an extremely religious woman. The sons were: 1. Ethelbald. He made trouble for his father and for Alfred, as will soon appear. He reigned two years after Ethelwulf (858-'60). 2. Ethelbert. He succeeded Ethelbald (860-'66). 3. Ethelred. He succeeded Ethelbert (866-'71). 4. Alfred.

With the first mentioned sons Alfred had more or less to do. They were men of different characters, not one of them, however, having the strong common sense, the judgment, the courage of the youngest of the brothers. The father and three sons, who reigned successively for thirty-two years (from 839 to 871) performed both valuable and valueless services for their little dominion; it was Alfred alone who saved and built up the kingdom, as we shall soon see.

**The Reign of Ethelwulf.**—In beginning a brief sketch of the father of Alfred the Great, we must look again for the moment at the actual situation of the country when he took the Wessex throne. He became king in 839 (possibly in 837), succeeding his father, the great King Egbert (Ecgeberht, as spelled in the *Saxon Annals*). It was Egbert who had raised up Wessex to its highest supremacy in arms, and had given it lordship over all the territory just described as constituting the kingdom of Wessex. He had also extended his victories far into the north, so that Wessex had become the dominant factor in all Britain's affairs; Egbert being recognized as the over-lord of the other adjacent territories. He it was who gave for the second time, and this time perma-

nently, the name of England to what had been styled Angle-land (about 827). But after these victories came the Danes, or Northmen. They were, strictly speaking, not Danes, but a mixture of hordes from Danishland and the Northland: pirates, bandits, vikings and whatnot, all bent on plundering Britain. The Northmen had been, previously, sea-robbers on Celtic coasts; had been to Ireland (in 795), where the Scots were; had plundered Hamburg (845); had gone later to France, sailed up the Seine to Paris, and found there a land so fair that they decided, later, to make it their own. Indeed these Northmen subsequently were the Normans.<sup>10</sup>

In Ethelwulf's day, beginning with the very start of his reign, but especially in 851, these robbers came down by thousands upon the eastern coast of England, a motley barbarian host, well leadered, to enrich themselves with the wealth of the monasteries that had been built up and made rich by the monks who had followed St. Augustine. It was no longer, as in the Roman time, Christian coming to conquer pagan, but pagan coming to conquer Christian. All Britain was more or less a "converted land;" a land which, however its people might war with each other, had forsaken the religion of Woden and Thor for the religion of Christ, and the Danes were out-and-out pagans.

The Danes—let us call them such, because the Saxons so called them—appeared first upon the British coast at Jarrow and Holy Island (784); and afterward obtained a foothold in Ireland

(833), and drove Egbert from the field, though he subsequently regained what he had lost. Egbert may not have thought these foreign foes would ever secure a permanent foothold, but when they came down again in the reign of his son Ethelwulf, it was discovered that they were worse than Picts and Scots, or even the descendants of the original Celts, who had for some centuries withdrawn from their old homes and survived chiefly in Wales. These Danes came only for pillage, it is true, but such pillage Saxons had never heard of before! They came into all the narrow rivers, and pounced upon the defenseless villages and monasteries that were everywhere unprotected.

In the *Chronicle* of Henry of Huntingdon (1084-1155), there is a description of the persistence and celerity of action on the part of these pirates that tells the whole tale: "It was wonderful how, when the English kings were hastening to encounter them in the eastern districts, before they could fall in with the enemy's bands, a hurried messenger would arrive and say, 'Sir King, whither are you marching? The heathens have disembarked from a countless fleet on the southern coast, and are ravaging the towns and villages, carrying fire and sword into every quarter.' The same day another messenger would come running, and say, 'Sir King, whither are you retreating? A formidable enemy has landed in the west of England, and if you do not quickly turn your face toward them, they will think you are fleeing, and follow in your rear with fire and



sword.' Again, the same day, or on the morrow, another messenger would arrive, saying, 'What place, O noble chiefs, are you making for? The Danes have made a descent in the north; already they have burnt your mansions; even now they are sweeping away your goods; they are tossing your young children raised on the points of their spears; your wives, some they have forcibly dishonored, others they have carried off.'

"To men of that day," says Green, the English historian (1837-'83), "it must have seemed as though the world had gone back three hundred years." Yes, nine hundred years. The Roman invasion was as nothing to it, for the Romans built up and did not pull down, while the Danes came only to destroy. They seemed to be devils incarnate, having neither pity for the poor or weak, nor regard for the sacred or princely. Christian priests were slain at their altars; art, government and religion, not to speak of quiet homelife, or progress in the upbuilding of an English nation, were equally in danger of being overthrown in one simultaneous catastrophe.

Ethelwulf was a prince less forceful than his father. He was brave, he was true, but the elements of great generalship were not in him. He met the invaders valiantly, and on the whole successfully. Had they been disposed at first to settle in the country, instead of acting as mere marauders and plunderers, they would probably have continued to molest the nearer coasts of the Angles, whose armies were so much weaker than those of the Saxon king. But they knew that

southern England was richer in towns and monasteries than Anglia, and, after each raid, they returned to their Northland with the plunder, and then planned another incursion into Kent, Sussex and Wessex, and this they kept up for a series of years.

As soon as Ethelwulf began to reign he deemed it wise to restrict his immediate oversight to Wessex proper and the country just north of it, and so he divided the Saxon territory into two parts, inviting his relative Athelstan<sup>11</sup> to be king of Essex, Kent and Sussex, while he retained Wessex. Athelstan took charge of the subordinate kingdom, while Ethelwulf held the higher throne in Wessex. Swithin, afterward St. Swithin, had educated Ethelwulf, and the latter's father, King Egbert, had instructed him in military discipline. The first important act of Ethelwulf when king was to make Swithin Bishop of Winchester. Then came the great incursions of the Danes, and his hands were full. He soon fought three bloody battles, at Rochester, Canterbury and London, with what success history does not state, but discouraging to his foes. The pirates for the next ten years turned their chief attention to France, and so, from about 841 to 851, the country had peace.

In the meantime Alfred was born (849) at Ethelwulf's royal residence at Wantage.

In 850 the Danes landed on the Isle of Thanet, near the mouth of the Thames, wintered there, and, in 851, others joined them, in 350 vessels, came up the Thames, and sacked Canterbury and London. They gave battle to Ethelwulf at Oke-

ley, and Ethelwulf was victor; so much so, says the historian of that time, that Ethelwulf and his son, Ethelbald, "there made the greatest slaughter among the heathen army that we have heard reported to this present day, and there got the victory." Other engagements, with other divisions of Ethelwulf's army, were also successful, and the Danes withdrew from England till Ethelwulf was dead, save as to one or two unimportant descents upon the coast. Ethelwulf followed up his victories by joining with the Mercians, who were his vassals, and chastising the Welsh.

In 854, after consultation with his Witan (his assembly of thanes), he published a charter for the Saxons, which was adopted by all the correlated nations, and which gave one-tenth of each manor as a tithing to the church. This was, probably, the origin of the state church in England.

**Alfred Goes to Rome.**—In 853, when Alfred could have been but four years of age, (if his birthyear was really 849), the Bishop of Winchester, Swithin, obtained the consent of Alfred's father to take the lad to Rome. It was a long journey of more than a thousand miles, all by land except for the short crossing of the English Channel, and usually occupied three months, if made with ordinary speed. The two had with them an escort of nobles and commoners. They stopped for a time at the court of France, and journeyed slowly, as was the custom with such retinues. Pope Leo IV. was on the Papal throne, and he received both visitors most kindly, anoint-

ing Alfred, it is said, as a future king, (doubtless at Ethelwulf's personal request). We know little else concerning this event, but a copy of an interesting letter from the Pope to Ethelwulf concerning the ceremony has been recently discovered among the papers of the Vatican. Leo wrote: "We have affectionately received your son Elfred . . . and have invested him as a spiritual son with the girdle, insignia and robes of the consulate, as is the manner of Roman consuls." Some have thought this amounted to a coronation, and that there was thus conferred upon the boy a titular office under the king of Kent (his youth would preclude its being more than that). What lends encouragement to this supposition is that, just before this time, Athelstan disappears from history. The company must have returned home within nine months or a year, unless (as some historians think) Alfred remained at Rome.

Two years later, Ethelwulf himself went to Rome, and took Alfred with him, if, indeed, Alfred did not remain there until his father's coming. On the way Ethelwulf stopped in France, and visited some of the large churches, and also the French court of Charles the Bald (King of France 840-877, and Emperor of the Romans 875-877).

The two remained in Rome an entire year. Much must have been crowded into the period for both father and boy. The king took with him the usual retinue of retainers and several nobles, and also a number of costly gifts. He took a crown four pounds in weight, and various dishes and fig-

ures in pure gold and silver, besides robes of rich silk interwoven with gold. There is every evidence that, on this first visit of any king of the Saxons to the Eternal City, Ethelwulf was welcomed and prized as a good king, deserving of honor, and of as royal a line as that of any other monarch in Europe. In truth the Pope must have taken a fancy to the king, for the Saxon record of his doings runs thus: "Leo was then Pope of Rome, and took him," (Ethelwulf) "for his son at confirmation." This may mean that Ethelwulf was confirmed as if he had been a son of the Pope, or it may mean that Alfred was too young to be confirmed into the Church but his father stood sponsor for him, the father "for his son" taking the usual vows. That Alfred never forsook the Church is certain. If subsequently, in his own time, it had turmoils and retrograded in some of its high purposes, it still found in Alfred a steadfast friend.

It is most probable that, before he undertook this journey, Alfred's mother was dead; for on the return journey through France, when he again visited the French king, Ethelwulf courted for three months and married Judith, the daughter of Charles the Bald. She is said to have been only twelve, or at most fourteen years of age. The ceremony occurred probably at Rheims, and at its conclusion the young bride was crowned, and was placed beside her husband on a throne. The fact of her youth, and especially the incident of her being placed upon the throne, so that she, a foreigner, was actually Queen of the Saxons, led to great

dissatisfaction afterwards; the more so because of another untoward event in her life, soon to be mentioned.

Osburga, who was the mother of Alfred, could have had but little to do in the formation of the real character of the boy, if it be true that she died when he was only three or four years of age. That she was a saintly woman we know. We know less of the character of Judith at this time, but it is certain that, when Ethelwulf returned with his bride, his eldest son, Ethelbald, whom he had left to reign in his stead during his absence, resented the marriage, and so did many of the Saxon nobles.

As a result of this marriage Ethelwulf—it is said at the instigation of Alstan, Bishop of Sherbourne, and Eauwulf, ealdorman of Somerset—determining over all things to have peace at home, turned over to Ethelbald his Wessex kingdom (in 856) and contented himself for the few remaining months of his life in ruling the subordinate kingdom of Kent, Sussex, Essex and Surrey (Athelstan, once ruler, being dead). He also made a will that his second son, Ethelbert, should take the same subordinate kingdom, after Ethelwulf's death. Ethelbald was not over-popular, and perhaps Ethelwulf could have regained his hold on his Wessex people, but, at all events, he was too good a man to fight against his own eldest son, and he surrendered the throne rather than war with him.

Of such stock as this Alfred sprang; upon the pattern of his father's meekness his character was largely formed; is it any wonder that he had

within him all the elements of a sound, sweet and noble character!

Ethelwulf died in 857, and was buried at Winchester. By his will he continued Ethelbald as king of Wessex, and gave Ethelbert the territory over which Ethelwulf had just reigned. His large landed estates he divided into two portions, the larger of which was bequeathed to three of his sons, Ethelbald, Ethelred and Alfred, and the smaller to his daughter, Ethelflæde (sometimes called Ethelswitha), who had married Burhred, king of Mercia, and a distant relative. It was also directed that the larger estate should be held by the sons jointly among them, and that it should ultimately become the property of the survivor; under that clause of the will Alfred, in a few years, became sole owner of most of his father's real estate.

**The Reign of Ethelbald.**—Ethelbald, on his father's death, forgot his antipathy to Judith, his step-mother, and married her, which created a scandal, being contrary to the laws of the church, if not of the state. The people protested, and the Bishop of Winchester induced him to effect a separation. She returned to her father's court in France, subsequently eloped with and married Baldwin Bras-de-Fer, a noble, who lived royally in Flanders. From their son, who subsequently married Alfred's daughter Elfrida, descended Matilda, wife of William the Conqueror, head of the Norman-English kings.

It is quite apparent that Alfred grew up to manhood without a mother's training. There is

one thing, however, that Alfred must have learned from Judith—to read and write. She must have been the one, and not his natural mother, of whom it is related that she first interested Alfred in books in this wise: “His mother, then, one day showed to Alfred and an older brother an ornamental manuscript of Saxon poems. To tempt them to begin to learn she said she would give the book to the boy who could first learn to read it. . . . Alfred was delighted with the beauty of the initial letter. Alfred spoke first, though the younger. ‘Will you really give it to the one who can most quickly understand and recite it before?’ She, glad and smiling, said, ‘To him will I give it.’ He took it from her hand, went to his master and read it. When it was read, he brought it back and recited it.” “It is not at all improbable,” says Thomas Hughes, in his *Life of Alfred*, “that Judith did not know of his power of memory, and that, instead of learning to read it, in our sense of the word, he got his master to read it over till he knew it by heart and could point with his finger to the words as he recited them.”

When Alfred's father died he was (probably) but nine years of age, and his education devolved upon his three brothers. So far as we know that education consisted chiefly in being taught to read and write, and also the sterner arts of the chase and of military discipline. That he early knew of the chase we can believe, for he was always fond of hunting, falconry and fishing; and that he must have learned the art of war well is even more certain, for he afterwards practiced it



with a master hand. No man ever became at twenty-one a great general without previous preparation for it.

Ethelbald only lived three years after his father, (dying 860). He had been a courageous warrior, and was long lamented by the men of Wessex as one whose death was "a national calamity."

**The Reign of Ethelbert.**—Ethelbert succeeded to both kingdoms, that of his father and of his brother, but he only lived to enjoy the double throne for a period of five years (860-866). During his reign there were several and nearly disastrous advents of the Danes. Winchester was sacked, but subsequently the Danes were defeated with considerable slaughter. Raids were also made in northeastern England. The whole country was under arms, prepared to defend itself, when Ethelbert died.

**The Reign of Ethelred.**—Ethelred was the third son of Ethelwulf, and to him the throne now came in succession, probably, as in the case of Ethelbert, less under law than under the custom of selecting the member of a family best qualified. The Witan, otherwise known as the "Great Council of Wessex," so directed, and it was a body of the wisest men of the kingdom, but Alfred, according to some, could have been joint-king with his brother had he desired. He chose, instead, to be called "secundarius," or second in the kingdom. If he really so chose, it proves his loyalty to his brother, his modest judgment of his own abilities, and his desire to mature more fully and "bide his time" before becoming king.

The period had now arrived for Alfred to show his manly qualities as a fighter. He was a lad of seventeen when Ethelred began to reign. About that same year (866) in the fall, several thousand Danish warriors swooped down on East Anglia, spent the winter near the coast, marched northward and took possession of York. York was about 180 miles northeast of Winchester, the capital of Wessex. The Danes overcame all opposition and temporarily settled down at York. The next year they marched south and took Nottingham. Then the King of Mercia, Burhred, who had married the sister of Ethelred and Alfred, sent to Ethelred for help. He responded at once and took Alfred with him, and the combined army of Mercia and Wessex recaptured Nottingham.

The Northmen now went into Lincolnshire, burnt monasteries and plundered generally. They reached Peterborough and then Ely, where they sacked the monasteries, and priests and nuns perished in the most cruel manner. For two years they overran the whole adjoining region with flame and sword, but did not get as far as Wessex. Entering East Anglia, they captured its Christian king, Edmund, bound him naked to a tree, scourged him, and required him to abjure his religion and reign under them, or die. He chose martyrdom. He was again whipped, then pierced with arrows, and beheaded. St. Edmund, the Martyr, has come down in history since as one of the great martyrs of the ages. The purity of his life and his bravery in death justly commended

him to the reverential sympathy of future generations.

It looked now, at last, as if Saxon England was to be undone, and by the very cousins of the Saxons themselves, for the Danes and Saxons were not unlike in origin, race, language, customs or appearance. In the meantime, what were Ethelred and Alfred doing? It appeared as if they were doing nothing. Three years in the field and no results! The Mercians were too terrified to act, and Ethelred was gathering together and drilling his Saxons. Winter followed winter; and the winters in England were colder and longer than at the present day. Little fighting ever occurred in winter, and in this case none in summer. The Saxons, however, were "getting ready."

At last, in 871, Alfred being past twenty-one, and sharing now with his brother in the leadership of the army, though Ethelred was the general in responsible charge, the time arrived for bloody conflict. The Danes reached Reading, in Wessex, fortified it, and prepared to go further into Saxon territory. Four days after they arrived there, Ethelred and Alfred came up with their army—we do not know just where it had been, nor its strength—and undertook to storm the Danish entrenchments, but without success. The Danes were valorous, well officered and skilful in battle, and the Saxons knew it well.

Then occurred the scene which was the first memorable one in Alfred's life. At night each side prepared for a great battle next day. When morning came, the Danes were ready in two divisions

on an eminence, and they came on for the fight. Ethelred was in his tent at mass. Alfred believed in the mass, but he knew there was no time for delay. He waited, sending in word to his brother, who came not, and then, believing his present business was fighting rather than prayer, Alfred gave the orders to charge the enemy, and led his men up the hillside—to victory! “The banner of the White Horse floated triumphantly over the Danish Raven.”

This first great battle of Alfred's was probably near what is now called White Horse Hill, at Ashdown, near Uffington, where may be seen to-day, what is believed to have been cut there in the hillside over a thousand years ago, the enormous figure of a white horse, 370 feet long. It is said to have been made by order of Alfred some years after this battle, to commemorate his first victory.<sup>12</sup> The white horse was the emblem of the Saxon armies, as the raven was of the Danish.

The Danes were pursued in confusion to Reading, some thirty miles away. One of their kings, and five leading jarls were slain, with many thousands of men. It was a great victory.

Within two weeks another battle was fought at Basing. In a brief time still another was fought at Morton. In each of these cases the Saxons claimed a victory, but, as the Danes remained after each battle in possession of the field, they could hardly have been such victories as Alfred would have liked. In this last battle Ethelred was wounded, and died of his wounds. At Eastertide,

in 871, the king was dead, and Alfred, at twenty-two, ascended the English throne.

Alfred at first declined to be the king, alleging his incapacity to do justice to his country in fighting the hated and ever-increasing Danes, but his objections were overruled, and the Archbishop of Canterbury placed the crown upon his head. Three of his brothers had now reigned in succession; it was his turn next, and probably few kings so young had ever come to rule at a time so stormy and so fraught with peril to a nation. The Danes were making their hardest attempt to wrest England from the Saxons, and it looked as if success must eventually perch upon their banners, for every ship that came from the Northland brought more and more warriors to swell the heathen host.

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### CHAPTER III

#### Alfred Upon the Throne

**Alfred at Twenty-two.**—Twenty-two years would be in these days a youthful period at which to mount a throne. True, there are some to become kings or queens earlier, but, if their subjects could choose the time, thirty would be the minimum of age for such a step. In the United States the President must be thirty-five years of age before he is eligible to his high office. However, in Alfred's case there was no option; he stood next in the royal line. Besides this, he was an uncommonly bright, sagacious and learned youth for his

years and for the age in which he lived. He had been brought up with unusual care; he was studious, thoughtful and brave. He is said to have had, like King David, much personal beauty, though weak in constitution and bearing in his body the seeds of a disease which never left him.

We have not heretofore said that Alfred had been married two years before he became king (about 869). We do not know the particulars. His wife was Elswitha (or Ethelswitha, as sometimes written), the daughter of a Lincolnshire ealdorman, whose name was also Ethelred and who was known as Earl of the Gaini; and it is probable he met, wooed and won her while with his brother in that shire, holding off the Danes with their joint forces. She was a descendant of one of the kings of Mercia. Her mother afterward came to live with the daughter, and probably continued to reside in Alfred's house during much of his kingship and until his death. We know this of the marriage feast, however, that "among innumerable multitudes of people of both sexes, and after continual feasts, both by day and by night," Alfred "was immediately seized, in presence of all the people, by sudden and overwhelming pain." Asser says this, and adds: "He had this sort of disease from childhood." He also says that on a former occasion it had passed away owing to Alfred's earnest prayers, but, after its return at this wedding, it continued to his forty-fourth year. It has been thought, owing to the early death of all his brothers, that the sons of Ethelwulf were constitutionally of weak health.

**Alfred Negotiates a Peace.**—He had scarcely been crowned before the summons was again to war. The Danes had been reinforced at Reading and had penetrated Wiltshire, and devastated the country for miles around. There was another battle, in which the superior numbers of the Danes gained them a victory, although Alfred's impetuosity and bravery at first almost won the day. Nine battles had now been fought within a year, and the final result, humanly speaking, was certainly in grave doubt. One more victory for the Danes and all might be over for England. Then Alfred considered. Could he not make terms, and thus secure time to strengthen his worn-out army? If so, he was sure it would help his cause in the end. In this he manifested no real cowardice, but great wisdom. He proposed to buy peace; he only asked that the Danes retire from Wessex, since he could not demand that they leave the country, and he promised them a moderate sum of money. They consented, and by it Wessex and Alfred gained four years of comparative quiet (872-875).<sup>13</sup>

During that four years the Danes completed the conquest of Mercia, and otherwise spent their time in ravaging France. The King of Mercia, Alfred's brother-in-law, was obliged to flee and went to Rome, where he died. By 876 the Danes were also in possession of all of Northumbria, where they became actual settlers, and began to till the soil; from thence they were never dislodged, but in process of time became one with Alfred's countrymen.

**Alfred Builds a Fleet.**—Since the days of the early Britons, who had large vessels and many of them, the people of Alfred's country had maintained no fleet. The Saxons, when they came over to England, were good sailors as well as fighters, but they had since given up all thoughts of being a seafaring people. The Danes came with prodigious fleets and landed anywhere on the coast, with no ships or fighting sailors to molest them. Alfred regretted this, and saw that his England could never become a power to grapple successfully with her foes without a navy. So he determined to revive the art of ship-building and sea-fighting.

The opportunity came during this brief era of peace. He built a small fleet and took command of it himself, though he had never been a sailor. It is said that he had to use "converted Danes" (Danes who had become Christians and joined the Saxons), to teach his men seamanship. In 875 he had occasion to prove his valor, and that of his men, who might almost have been called the "Beggars of the Sea." They must have seemed as "beggars," for their vessels could not have been large, nor their experience much above that of amateurs; but they had courage, great faith and an abundance of patriotic and religious zeal, and these count more than numbers. His first naval fight occurred when he met seven Danish vessels somewhere off the south coast. He captured one ship from the enemy, and gave the rest so hard a fight that they made off for the Northland, and so Wessex was again saved.



**Two More Fighting Years.**—Our American forefathers thought that seven years (from 1775-81) constituted a long, long period in which to wage a conflict for home and country. So it was. But the English folk, as represented by Alfred, had up to this time a far worse enemy to fight than the soldiers of Howe or Cornwallis; an enemy without scruple, with no aim but to plunder, and yet desperately brave and well-drilled; and there had been one continued struggle for a period of nearly twenty years, with the odds always in favor of the final Danish conquest. There were to be yet two years of bloody war, for it was not until 878 that the sword was to be sheathed, and Alfred was to reign in lasting peace.

In those two years events quickly succeeded one another. The Danish fleet again made port in some of the harbors of the southern coast and sent out plundering parties, but none of them would encounter Alfred. In fact, since Alfred's early victories with his army, no Danish army would meet him in fair and open combat. The Danes raided Exeter, and once more made peace with Alfred, only to break it at the first opportunity. A big storm scattered their fleet one day (877), and Alfred's fleet finished up what was left of them; in the whole one hundred and twenty Danish vessels were destroyed. Again there was a truce, and the Danish landmen moved on up into Mercia.

No historian has ever been able to clear up the mystery connected with the hiding of Alfred for

the four months from January to May, 878. He had been on the whole and everywhere victorious until the first-named month. Then, suddenly, when the Danes reappeared with a fleet of thirty warships on the Devonshire coast, and their army came into Wessex, the courage of his army seems to have suddenly faltered. There was treachery in his own camp, and his men, tired of fighting, deserted him. The particulars are not known; they seem to be somewhat mysterious. But we know the fact that Alfred "with a small band with difficulty retreated to the woods and the fastnesses of the moors." There seems to have been disloyalty and disorganization, yet it has rather been surmised than proven.

Alfred disappeared; his subjects themselves did not know where he was. We know that he was in Selwood Forest, in Somerset, some seventy miles or more west of Wantage, his birthplace, and there, in a marsh, on an island formed by two little streams (the island was called Athelney and contained not over two acres of ground), he made a camp and fortified it. Everywhere around were alder bushes and then stretches of unbroken forest.

Here is where, in the absence of true history, legend has woven various pretty tales about Alfred and his men. One of them concerns his want of food, and the securing of it. He needed both fish and fowl, and the account goes on in this wise: No one was in the hut, one day, but himself and his mother-in-law, his people having gone out to get game or food. "The King (after his

constant wont whenever he had opportunity) was reading from the Psalms of David, out of the Manual which he carried always in his bosom. At this moment a poor man appeared at the door and begged for a morsel of bread 'for Christ His sake.' Whereupon the King, receiving the stranger as a brother, called to his mother-in-law to give him to eat. Eadburgha replied that there was but one loaf in their store, and a little wine in a pitcher. But the King bade her nevertheless to give the stranger part of the last loaf, which she accordingly did. But when he had been served the stranger was no more seen and the loaf remained whole and the pitcher full to the brim. Alfred, meantime, had turned to his reading, over which he fell asleep, and dreamed that St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne stood by him and told him it was he who had been his guest, and that God had seen his afflictions and those of his people, which were now about to end, in token whereof his people would return that day with a great take of fish." That day the men brought in enough fish "to have fed an army!" And "the next morning the King crossed to the mainland in a boat, and wound his horn twice, which drew to him before noon five hundred men."

Another legend about Alfred, connected with his hiding at Athelney, is told by the historian Freeman (1823-'92), who thinks it a likely story, in these words: "Alfred, wishing to know what the Danes were about and how strong they were, set out one day from Athelney in the disguise of a minstrel, or juggler, and went into the Dan-

ish camp, and staid there several days amusing the Danes with his playing, till he had seen all that he wanted, and then went back without any-one finding him out."

One of the jewels probably owned by Alfred was found at Athelney, in 1693, and is now in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford.

This jewel, about which much has been written is described as a fine specimen of the artistic metal work of the Saxon period. It was found not far from Athelney Abbey, in Somersetshire, and consists of a jewel in enamel and gold in battledore shape. The obverse is faced with an oval plate, of rock crystal, nearly one-half an inch thick, through which may be seen the enamelled mosaic let into cells of gold. The figure is that of a man holding a fleur-de-lis in each hand. The reverse is a detached plate of gold, on which is elegantly traced a fleur-de-lis branching into three stems. The inscription is "Ælfred Mee He Ht Gewyr-can." (Alfred me ordered to be wrought.) The stem terminates in a grotesque figure, representing on the obverse the head of a sea-monster. The jewel may have been a pendant to a necklace or collar, but more likely was an ornament on the front of the helmet. Sir Francis Palgrave (1788-1861) believes the mosaic enamel figure is much older than its setting, and was probably presented to King Alfred as a valuable relic by the Pope or other great personage in his day. The gold setting is clearly of Saxon work.

Whatever Alfred did that winter and early spring, however he got together again an army, he

did arise from his hiding-place, and the word went around that "the King is still alive" (it was thought by many that he was dead); and, on May 12, 878, oaths of fealty to him and his country were made at Brixton, twenty-five miles east of Athelney, and now he was ready to conquer his seemingly unconquerable foes. Almost the next day, certainly within a few days at most, he fought the battle of Ethandune (Eddington), and again struck his old-time enemies with a vigor and dexterity that were crushing. About a thousand Danish dead were left on the field and great spoils gathered.

**Another Peace.**—This was the last refuge in this part of England by the army of Guthrum, which had troubled Alfred for full eight years. Guthrum had been the chief leader of the Danish forces since 870, and was the king who had time and again made and broken peace with Alfred. He had done more to cow and subdue the people of Mercia and Wessex than any other of Alfred's foes. Now he retreated to the river Avon, but was surrounded, and fourteen days thereafter he sued for terms, and declared he was ready to be baptised as a Christian! Alfred, strangely enough, but wisely as the sequel shows, exercising what may be properly termed "divine patience," and certainly proving his generosity and manliness toward a fallen foe, accepted the proffer. He allowed the remnant of his army to march away, and accepted a pledge that Guthrum and thirty of his bravest men would appear at a fixed date and become Christians. At Wedmore, a sort of royal

residence of Alfred, they came at the specified date seven weeks after the surrender, and Alfred himself was godfather in baptism to Guthrum, giving him the Christian name of Athelstan. After the ceremony it was agreed that these "converted" pagans should settle down in East Anglia, and govern it as a Danish kingdom, while Alfred should rule his own kingdom in peace.

The peace concluded at this time (July, 878), and known as the "Treaty of Wedmore," was executed in writing and copies of it still exist.<sup>14</sup> It contains only about two hundred and fifty words, and the beginning of it, as rendered into modern English, is as follows:

*"Alfred and Guthrum's Peace:* This is the peace that King Alfred and King Guthrum, and the Witan of all the English nation and all the people that are in East Anglia, have all ordained and with oaths confirmed for themselves and their descendants, as well for born as unborn, who reckon of God's mercies or of ours."

It is evident from the Treaty of Wedmore that he made no distinction between Englishmen and Danes, as to tendering to both alike the promise of equal and exact justice. "If a man be slain," he said, "we estimate all equally dear." In the provision as to trials for murder, we see the foundation of the trial by jury, now long enshrined in the hearts of Englishmen: "If a king's thane be accused of man-slaying, if he dare to clear himself, let him do that with twelve king's thanes." If a man were of less degree than a king's thane, he was to clear himself with eleven of his equals

and with one king's thane. One clause in the Treaty indicates that he expected a natural feud between the Saxon and Danish people would not suddenly cease, and so he ordained that intercourse between them should not be without leave: "Neither bond nor free may go to the host without leave, no more than any of them to us."

The Treaty prescribes the boundaries of the kingdoms, the penalties for manslaughter, and certain warranties. By it Alfred was established as King of the whole of England south of the Thames, and of Essex south of the river Lea, and of nearly the whole of Mercia. It left the north-eastern part of present England to the Danes. Thus were laid securely the foundations of a new kingdom, which afterwards grew, almost without bloodshed, to be one England from Scotland to the south coast.

Guthrum and his followers were loaded with gifts, and Alfred continued his reign in comparative peace, which lasted for fifteen years.

**What Alfred Now Accomplished.**—As soon as the Treaty of Wedmore had been concluded, Alfred turned his attention to the fortifying of his domains, which were in sore need of it. For the lack of anything like forts, or of walls around their cities, Wessex and the adjoining sections of England had been open to every foe. While the Romans had originally fortified some of these cities, and erected strong walls around them, they had been allowed through the intervening centuries to go into decay. Such places as Exeter, London, Reading, Chippenham and Peterborough

could not stand before an army for an hour; only in the open fields could the progress of a foreign army be contested. When the Danes captured a city, they had the good sense to fortify it and then could not be dislodged. It was the one weak point in Saxon warfare that no provision had been made for strong and permanent walls or forts.

Alfred never showed his wisdom to more advantage than when he began immediately after the Peace to build up fortresses all along the coast. Holding as King the bookland<sup>15</sup> of his country to be used for his country's good, he employed all its revenues to fortify the kingdom and to build bridges. He found London in the hands of some of the Northmen and the seat of pirates, and, while formerly it had been a thriving municipality, it was miserably run down and inconsequential. As it now belonged to him by the Treaty he took possession of it, first, however, having strengthened his own Wessex in every part. He reorganized the entire city. As the account, written almost at the time, says, he "honorably rebuilt the city of London and made it again inhabitable." He put all the masons and mechanics he could find—they were mostly foreigners—at work at regular pay, and in a few months the city had resumed a prosperous look. It soon took the station which it has occupied ever since as the chief commercial city of the country. In his day and long afterwards Winchester continued to be the capital of Wessex (practically of all England), but London was given this honor in the days of King Canute (994?-1035). The year in which



London was thus rebuilt was 886, or eight years after the Peace.

In the meantime Alfred continued to build ships. In 882 he went out in person to command a fleet, and scattered and destroyed a small Viking squadron. In 885 he sent a fleet up along the east coast and destroyed sixteen vessels of the East Anglian Danes, who were then trying to break the Peace. This was succeeded by disaster on the sea which only set him to building bigger ships. Like Peter the Great, Alfred had now well learned the art of ship-building, and he determined to build "long ships that were nigh twice as large as those of the Danes, some with sixty oar, some with more. They were steadier and swifter and also higher than others, and were shaped near as the Frisian or the Danish ships, but as it seemed to himself that they would be most handy." With these, in 897, he destroyed twenty Viking ships. In the previous year (896) some Viking invaders had pushed a fleet up the river Lea, to within fifteen miles of London; it was a stream much narrower than the Thames. Here the larger ships of Alfred could not get at them, if, indeed, they were then at hand, as to which the record is silent. But Alfred obstructed the stream with, probably, floating booms, and "bottled" the fleet up. The Vikings had to abandon them, and Alfred took possession of all the vessels.

Beside this, Alfred largely increased his military force, and had at hand, or ready for call, a better, as well as larger, army than he or his pre-

decessors ever had. In 893 this army was put to a severe test and it happened in this wise:

For fifteen years there had been comparative quiet; the Danes themselves, especially such as were a party to the Wedmore agreement, had given little trouble. In the meantime Alfred's kingdom had so grown that it included all of Mercia, and also much of Wales, for the kings of the minor Welsh provinces had put themselves under his protection. But suddenly Hastings, one of the most renowned of the Viking kings, who had desolated Gaul, came over from Boulogne with three hundred and thirty sail in two divisions, and landed on the shores of Kent. The army brought upon these vessels was able to wage a contest against Alfred for three long years (893-897).

Alfred collected his forces, marched into Kent and confronted his new foes. Hastings had no scruples; he at once decided on an act of perfidy. He saw the impossibility of winning over so great a general in a pitched battle; so he offered to depart for a sum of money, gave hostages for the actual performance of the bond, and, as a further proof of sincerity, offered to have his two sons receive the sacrament of Christian baptism. Alfred believed in his honesty and accepted the offer. While the programme was being approved, a part of the army of Hastings stole away, and began to desolate portions of Wessex. Alfred overtook and routed them, upon which they accepted terms and departed. Hastings himself now resumed warfare; there was a fight at Exeter, again resulting in victory, and another in Essex, where

Alfred's general (his son-in-law, Ethelred) captured not only the treasures of Hastings, but that king's wife and children. After this last battle Hastings promised to depart forever. No more is heard of him in history until later, when he again desolated a part of France, and, finally, in the city of Chartres, ended his career as pirate and despoiler by accepting that city and its neighboring territories as the lord and vassal of Charles the Simple (879-929).

With the departure of Hastings all the Danes he had with him did not leave; there was yet a small army of plunderers, who gained fresh recruits and gave Alfred trouble, until he finally routed them and every open enemy from every quarter of his kingdom (in 896). Alfred's fine powers of organization, his gifted prevision, won out; he was enabled to spend the last four years of his life in peace.

Alfred's war record was, from first to last, with the exception of the four months of his hiding, an pen, brave, forceful and victorious record. He made few if any mistakes. The worst that can be said of him as a warrior is that he was too merciful; that he was too ready to accept proffers of peace, when his foes never intended to carry out the terms. He was so honest and straightforward himself that he believed in the integrity of pagan kings and chieftains when they put themselves upon their honor, although he too frequently discovered that their ideas of truth and honor were wholly at variance with his own. But to put one's self in his place, even in thought, is a diffi-

cult task. His foes came from Scandinavian countries in endless hordes; they were well-trained fighters; they often outnumbered him; they had little to lose by defeat; he had every possible disadvantage on his side except patriotism and justice. Who can say that, if he had been in Alfred's place, with the same conscience and innate love for peace, and with the same uncertain and often treacherous underlings, he would have dealt more rigorously with his enemies after they actually sued for peace? Events proved that in the end Alfred justified himself in possessing as great a moral character as was his leadership in battle.

**Alfred's Last Four Years.**—The events of the last four years of Alfred's life, so far as they made history, may be summed up in a few words. They have been called his "silent years," because he was quietly pursuing the arts of peace. In another chapter we shall call attention more specifically to some of the wonderful things he accomplished, but the following brief summary will show the scope of his later achievements.

He laid down laws for his people that have not yet been wholly departed from in spirit and form by the English statutes. He established courts of justice, that did give justice to every man. He made it safe for a traveler to journey anywhere over his kingdom and be unmolested. He laid down the boundaries of the shires (counties), so that they were certain, and not, as before, indefinite; in fact his "survey" of the country, duly engrossed and called the "Roll of Winchester," was the foundation of the "Domesday-Book" of William the

Conqueror. He remade the whole civil fabric of English shires and hundreds,<sup>16</sup> and on his basis, for the most part, they stand to this day. He raised large revenues, not for his own benefit, but for the good of the nation. He rebuilt monasteries, one of them being at Athelney (doubtless as a thank-offering), and abbeys (chiefly to secure good schools and also to promote religion); but, as his own people would not become monks, he had to fill his monasteries with monks from abroad. He built substantial roads and bridges; established numerous churches; laid foundations for colleges; sent abroad and had learned monks come to England as instructors; gathered around him wise counselors and authors; established the Saxon literature; translated and wrote books; sent embassies to Rome; and sent gifts to Christian churches as far off as Palestine, and perhaps to India.

No man ever gathered around him more true and trusty friends; no man was ever more happy in his private, domestic life; no king ever had more honor in his time from the kings of other nations, than Alfred. When he died, he was lamented at home and abroad with the keenest sorrow.

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## CHAPTER IV

### Something About the Saxons

**The Saxon Language.**—The Saxon language was an importation from the north of Europe—from the land of the Saxons. Subsequently it

merged into Anglo-Saxon, which was the intermixture of Saxon and of dialects used by the Angles, but the Saxon speech was the stronger and more enduring.

The Saxons gained little in their tongue from the British Celts; the two languages would not amalgamate. Our English of to-day has some words in its vocabulary purely Celtic, as *rail*, *pail*, *mop*, *button*, *basket*, etc., and various Celtic proper names; but the Celts did not so enrich our present mother-speech as naturally they should have done. The Danes in England added a few words to the spoken language of Alfred's day, but scarcely more than the Celts. The Latin, of course, added thousands of words to the tongue during and after Alfred's time, and some have come from the Norman-French.

Was this Saxon language such as would now be intelligible to our ears? Certainly not. Modern English is no more ancient Saxon than ancient Saxon is Greek, so far as one may determine who simply listens to it. Here are two lines of a passage from King Alfred; who of our readers would recognized them as of English speech, except in three of its words:

"Fela spella him saedon tha  
Beormas aethther ge of hym," etc.

How many ordinary readers could translate it literally to be:

"Many tidings (to) him said the  
Beormas either of their."

The Anglo-Saxon tongue became changed and

changed as the centuries went on, until, in the days of Chaucer (1328-1400) and Wycliffe (1324-'84), it developed pretty nearly into modern speech. The changes from that period to King James' time were modifications only, and, from the time of that King's ecclesiastical council to the present, they have been so slight in all foundation words and phrases, that the Bible of 1611 still remains as the grandest expression of the improved Saxon tongue, and of present English literary speech. Nevertheless, it remains true that the language of Alfred would not be understood by any but the learned—and by few of them—in our own day.

**Manners and Customs of the Saxons.**—It may be interesting to take a look at the state of society at this period. What kind of subjects did Alfred possess; what were their habits, customs, education; wherein did they differ from Englishmen of to-day?

As has been stated, his people were Saxons, of the same general, but not specific, nationality as the Danes, and had manners and personal characteristics not unlike their late pagan foes, except that these had been modified by the leavening influences of Christianity. But these leavening influences had been much; not thorough, but of the greatest importance. The monks who had gone to England from Rome were not all wise men, but, for the most part, they were sincere and self-sacrificing evangelists, and the monasteries they had erected in all the important towns and points were centres both of piety and learning. The

monasteries were the schools of the kingdom. They were schools for the few, it is true, but they were beacon-lights to the surrounding communities.

The Saxons were not an educated people. They had had no opportunities for this, having been fighters for generations. Among the masses superstitions abounded. Alfred was the first king to give them the incentive to education, and, in the first years of his period of long peace, it was one of the earliest matters that gained his attention. They were also poor as well as ignorant of the knowledge of books. The monks, too, were poor, but they knew and practiced the arts of painting and music, while possessing a knowledge of Latin and Greek, of astronomy and, of course, of theology.

Fine houses the Saxons did not have and did not desire. They had small, wooden huts, without chimneys, the smoke of their fires escaping by a hole in the roof. A house which contained a second story was rare, and in such case the entrance was from the outside by a stairway, or ladder. To prevent drafts curtains were hung up by the door in winter. But they had good living; they were not amateurs in the art of cooking well, and they ate much and often. The doors of the houses always opened outward and were left open (that is were never locked or bolted), as this would have betokened a want of hospitality. This custom of unfastened doors still prevails in Norway and in some other sections of northern Europe. Chairs were unknown, but benches, stools and settles too



their place. They carved these elaborately, as they also did their cradles. Their dishes were of bone, horn or wood, and their drinking-horns (they drank immoderately of strong liquors) were ornamented with silver or gold. Those Saxon drinking-horns were always famous, and the descendants of Saxons for centuries, even to Shakespeare's day, continued to make and use most elaborate and beautiful specimens of that handiwork. It is said that the Danes introduced the custom of immoderate drinking, but, if so, the Saxons never forgot the lesson. Tables of the wealthy had on them immense cloths, the ends of which also served as napkins.

As to dress, the Saxon men wore a tunic of woolen in winter and linen in summer. It reached to the knees and was fastened by a belt to the waist. This was the usual custom of all Teutonic nations, and is yet of the Laplanders in the far north of Scandinavia. The women wore a linen tunic with tight sleeves, and the wealthy used embroidery of much richness. The personal ornaments worn were numerous, the few rich Saxon nobles being fond of gold and silver jewels.

It is well-known that Alfred imported gold artificers, and that among other things practiced by skilled workers was a weaving in gold-wire of stoles for the monks. Anselm (1033-1109), Archbishop of Canterbury, says that he saw, in 1098, a Canterbury vestment of King Canute's time (994-1035) which was the most gorgeous cope he had ever seen. This was doubtless in

needlework, in which the skill of the Saxon ladies was very great.

As to Saxon songs and Saxon love of music, considerable has been written going to show that the people generally were strangely fond of war-songs and of music upon the harp.

There was farming, but it was on a meagre scale, the country being largely covered with immense forests, and the long conflict having made it impossible for the people to give much attention to agriculture. Not over one-fifth of the land was available for tillage. There is no doubt, however, that they had a genuine taste for farming and otherwise possessed great natural capacity for getting on. They were honest and industrious.

A characteristic of the men was the wearing of long hair and the cultivation of forked beards. The vice of tattooing the skin prevailed. Among the ordinary foods mentioned were fish, eggs, butter, cheese, beans, herbs, honey and salt. During the summer much food was salted down for winter use. Wine was scarce, but there was plenty of mead and ale. Flour was ground by the poor in handmills, although there were also water-mills and wind-mills. The bread used was made from barley. Meat was boiled, broiled and baked. Barley flour was universally used for bread.

That the Saxons had games similar to chess and backgammon is certain. They fished as the moderns do with rod and line, and also the net. The arms carried in war were long broadswords and short daggers, and circular shields of hide, rimmed

with metal. They also had helmets of leather on metal framework.

Polygamy was not unknown, and the practice seems to have prevailed of a son marrying his father's widow when not his mother. This latter practice may account in part for the marriage of Ethelbert to his step-mother, Judith.

Horses was not used for agriculture, but oxen; the horses being reserved for the chase and for war.\*

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## CHAPTER V

### Alfred's Death and Characteristics

**Alfred's Death and Burial.**—Alfred died on October 26, 901.<sup>17</sup> The cause and the place of his death are both unknown. It is not unlikely that the malady which had often prostrated him was the cause, and it is quite probable he died at the capital of his kingdom, Winchester, in Wolvesley Castle, although it may have been elsewhere. At all events he was buried in Winchester, perhaps in the Church of St. Swithin, perhaps in that of St. Peter, or perhaps in the monastery near the present Cathedral, which was not then in existence, but whose site was occupied by a Saxon abbey of the Seventh Century (finished 648), which Alfred had begun to supplant by a "New Minster." The uncertainty comes of different ac-

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\*For a full account of early Saxon customs and history see another volume of this "Library," to be published later.

counts of the place. In Henry I.'s day (1068-1135), the abbey was removed about a half mile to the west, and from thenceforth was known as Hyde Abbey; the removal was to make room for the Cathedral and its close. At that time (1110 or 1121), the remains of Alfred were removed to the Abbey, and perhaps—not certainly—they were found and again reinterred during the last century below the flat slab in the peaceful cemetery just outside the parish church of St. Bartholomew, near the present remains of Hyde Abbey. Be this the true spot of the real present resting-place of his bones or ashes, or not, one loves to think of them as there, out in the open, under the blue sky, where birds warble through the summer days, and where a buttercup or leaf of yarrow can be gathered by the traveler as he muses over what a great and manly man King Alfred was.

**Alfred's Will.**—Alfred's will has long been noted for the insight it gives into his father's estates and his own, and for certain notable statements it contained. Perfect copies of it exist. By this will he devised eight manors to his nephew, Etheline, eldest son of his brother Ethelward; to his nephew, Ethelwald, three manors; but the principal part of his real estate, in Wiltshire and Somersetshire, including the royal burgh of Wymore, he gave to his son Edward, who succeeded his father as king. He left manors to his other children, and to his wife the "homestead" at Wantage, where he was born, and also two other manors. It was quite in keeping with the affection he had for his faithful helpmate, Elswitha,

that he left her his birthplace, (and probably Ashdown, the scene of his earliest and greatest victory). He also gave to each of his sons £500, and to his wife and daughters £100 each, and left various small legacies to friends, including £200 to his servants and poor retainers. "Also," he says, "let them," (his servants) "distribute for me and for my father and for the friends that he interceded for, and I intercede for, £200—50 to the mass-priests all over my kingdom, 50 to the poor ministers of God, 50 to the distressed poor, 50 to the church that I shall rest at. And I know not certainly whether there be so much money; nor I know not but that there may be more, but so I suppose. If it be more, be it all common to them to whom I have bequeathed money. And I will that my ealdormen and counsellors be all there together and so distribute it."

He evidently wrote all his will with his own hand; it was the product of his own beneficent mind. To get at the value of these seemingly small bequests, the amounts must be multiplied by at least five, as the purchasing power of money in Alfred's time was fully five times what it is to-day; and we are also to remember that the royal private purse in his day was not large, and that his estates were mostly in lands rather than in personalty.

The most memorable part of Alfred's will, perhaps, is this, which declares his requirement that his former slaves should remain free: "And I beseech, in God's name and in His saints', that none of my relations do obstruct none of the freedom of

those I have redeemed. And for me the West Saxon nobles have pronounced as lawful, that I may leave them free or bond, whether I will. But I, for God's love and my soul's health, will that they be masters of their freedom and of their will; and I, in the Living God's name, entreat that no man do disturb them, neither by money exaction, nor by no manner of means, that they may not choose such man as they will. And I will that they restore to the families at Domerham their land deeds and their free liberty, such master to choose as may to them be most agreeable, for my sake, and for Ethelflæda's, and for the friends that she did intercede for, and I do intercede for." Quite worthy to be put alongside of the Proclamation of Emancipation of Abraham Lincoln!

**Alfred's Successor.**—A few words should be said about Alfred's successor to the throne, and then we must complete a too-brief sketch of this "mirror of princes," as Wordsworth terms him, by turning to a reconsideration of certain great traits of his character, and a further look at some of his magnificent achievements, as statesman, as religious man and as author.

Alfred did not and could not name his successor, but the Witan of Wessex did, and they named his son Edward. His nephew, Ethelwald, however, rebelled at this decision, seized the royal castles at Wimbourne and Christchurch, and then, finding Alfred's kingdom too strong for any pretender, fled, and was not heard of for two years. In 904 he came with a fleet of Northmen to Essex, and a portion of the Danish population

of that shire submitted to his authority. The next year he attacked Berkshire, and Edward, who had been crowned king at Winchester, went after him with an army. In an action Ethelwald was slain.

Edward had to fight for his kingdom against both traitors at home and Danes from abroad, but he eventually overcame all opposition, and even the Scots chose him as their "father" and "lord." He died in 925. In history he is known as Edward the Elder.

**The King's Homelife.**—That Alfred was necessarily away from his home and family a large part of the time, there is no doubt. In fact he had no settled home, because he was obliged to abide now in one county and now in another, in such "royal residences" as were for the most part of the simplest description. We cannot believe that at the first Alfred had, as a rule, other than buildings of wood, differing only from the buildings of the ordinary wealthy Saxon in being larger, so as to take care of his various servants and those representatives of other nations—diplomats, artists, artisans, military men, learned men and monks—who flocked to him, because of his exceeding friendliness to all these classes. He spent much time, however, at Wolvesey Castle, in Winchester, (where his father had educated him). Here he often held his court, and here he edited the *Saxon Chronicles*.

Of his queen, Elswitha (or Ethelswitha), we know little, except as to her faithfulness. She trained her children in the best manner, and they

all "turned out well." She survived her husband four years, dying in 905.

**The King's Children.**—We may, in a few sentences, state the names and what became of each of Alfred's children. The eldest, Ethelflæda, who was born in the first year of her father's reign, married Ethelred, who was the Ealdorman of Mercia. She shared the government with her husband, and led a life of activity and benevolence. The second daughter was Ethelgeda, who became abbess of the monastery at Shaftsbury, which was the first monastery erected by the King after the Peace of Wedmore. The third daughter, Elfrida (or Elfthryth), became the wife of Baldwin of Flanders, the eldest son of Judith, who had been the second wife of Alfred's father, and then the wife of his brother. The boys were two in number, Edward and Ethelward. Edward was courageous, courteous, martial and strenuous, following in these respects the path laid out by his father. Edward succeeded Alfred, as we have seen, and at his death was succeeded by his son, Athelstan. Alfred's second and younger son, Ethelward, showing a partiality for study, was carefully educated, but the particulars of his life or time of his death have not been given.

**Alfred's Religious Life.**—It may be easily gleaned from the foregoing what the religious life of Alfred was; how true and deep it proved and how it influenced his whole character. From the time he went to Rome, he was a thoroughly religious boy. In youth and middle age his faith in God and in the church never failed. The fact



that, upon his entrance to the throne, he immediately began to erect monasteries, and to reconstruct those which had been partially destroyed, proves that he believed in the monastic life; indeed it was the only life in that day which protected purity, and advanced among young and old a knowledge of exalted religious principles. In the punishment of crimes, he required that both state and church should have jurisdiction over criminals. While the King and his Witan, or a judge and jury, punished state offenders by fines or imprisonment, he also held that they committed a moral sin to be dealt with by the spiritual authorities. So for every crime there was a prescribed penance. This was an ideal which could not be expected to be continued in England after the birth of Protestantism, but in its day it accomplished wonders, and we never hear of any serious conflict between church and state. Besides sending couriers with presents every year to Rome, and embassies to far-away lands, taking money for the Christian poor, he distributed many gifts among his cathedrals, and always had a ready hand of help for the poor and the needy.

He was often at prayer openly in the churches, and, though a monarch, deemed it his highest privilege to kneel humbly on the steps of a church altar. He brought up his children as he was brought up himself, with a profound dependence upon the faithfulness and love of Almighty God, and this was the touchstone of his whole character.

Alfred not only sent various embassies to Rome, but it seems that he made a vow before he rebuilt

London that, if he should be successful in that undertaking, he would send gifts to the Christian churches in the far East. In other words, while he had no men to send as missionaries, he could give what then was probably more acceptable to the poor churches of Asia, money. That he sent gifts to the patriarch of Jerusalem is probable, because the latter sent back letters and presents to the King. It is also believed that he sent a deputation as far as India, where churches had been already founded.

In the days of Alfred there were no candles and so he invented them, his motive, however, being religious rather than secular. He had made a determination to give to God half his time, day and night, owing to his having neither clocks nor watches. Accordingly, he invented candles, which were measured to burn exactly four hours each. Each candle was divided into twelve equal parts by lines drawn upon the surface. As the doors and windows of the churches, then of the most rude architecture, were full of fissures in plankings and walls, and as sometimes places for services were only tents, and high winds would blow out the candles, or make them burn unevenly, he followed up his first invention with a second—a lantern. He contrived a box to hold the candle, making doors of white ox-horn, reduced to such thinness that they were like glass.

As is stated above, Alfred gave one-half of his time to the service of God, either at worship, or reading or translating the Psalms and other religious works, or in deeds of charity. In addition,

he gave half of his income to the Lord. Ethelwulf, his father, had thought it sufficient, following the practice in Old Testament times, to set aside one-tenth part of the income of his royal estates "for the glory of God and his own eternal salvation." Alfred decided that this was not sufficient, and he increased it to five-tenths. In other words, he divided his income into two equal parts: the first secular, and the second ecclesiastical. The ecclesiastical portion was divided into four parts: the first for the poor of all nations; the second for the monasteries he had founded; the third for his schools, the teaching in which was semi-religious; and the fourth for the neighboring monasteries in various parts of England, Wales and Ireland.

Alfred's own testimony to his life—at least as he described it—he summed up himself in one of his works: "I can assert this in all truth, that during the whole course of my existence I have always striven to live in a becoming manner, and at my death to leave to those who follow me a worthy memorial in my work."

In this connection it will be interesting to quote some of Alfred's own words, to show the purity of his soul and to give an insight into his serene and lofty character. The first are words directed to his son from his *Proverbs*: "Thus quoth Alfred: My dear son, sit thou now beside me, and I will deliver thee true instruction. My son, I feel that my hour is near, my face is pale, my days are nearly run. We must soon part. I shall to another world, and thou shalt be left alone with all my wealth. I pray thee, for thou art my dear

child, strive to be a father and a lord to thy people; be thou the children's father, and the widow's friend; comfort thou the poor and shelter the weak, and with all thy might right that which is wrong. And, my son, govern thyself by law, then shall the Lord love thee, and God above all things shall be thy reward. Call thou upon Him to advise thee in all thy need, and so He shall help thee the better to compass that which thou wouldst."

The next, from his *Boethius*, shows his humility in a preëminent degree, and we know of no king since David who could have written in this strain: "Power is never a good, unless he be good that has it; so it is the good of the man, not of the power. If power be goodness, therefore is it that no man by his dominion can come to the virtues, and to merit; but by his virtues and merit he comes to dominion and power. Thus no man is better for his power; but if he be good, it is from his virtues that he is good. From his virtues he becomes worthy of power, if he be worthy of it. . . . By wisdom you may come to power, though you should not desire the power. You need not be solicitous about power, nor strive after it. If you be wise and good, it will follow you, though you should not wish it. Ah! Wise One, thou knowest that greed and the possession of this earthly power never were pleasing to me, nor did I ever greatly desire this earthly kingdom—save that I desired tools and materials to do work that it was commanded me to do. This was that I might guide and wield wisely the authority committed to me.

Why! thou knowest that no man may understand any craft or wield any power, unless he have tools and materials. Every craft has its proper tools. But the tools that a king needs to rule are these: to have his land fully peopled; to have priestmen, and soldiermen, and workmen. Yea! thou knowest that without these tools no king can put forth this capacity to rule. . . . It was for this I desired materials to govern with, that my ability to rule might not be forgotten and hidden away. For every faculty is apt to grow obsolete and ignored, if it be without wisdom; and that which is done in unwisdom can never be reckoned as skill. This will I say—that I have sought to live worthily the while I lived, and after my life to leave to the men that come after me a remembering of me in good work. . . . Ah! my soul, one evil is stoutly to be shunned. It is that which most constantly and grievously deceives all those who have a nature of distinction, but who have not attained to full command of their powers. This is the desire of false glory and of unrighteous power, and of immoderate fame of good deeds above all other people. For many men desire power that they may have fame, though they be unworthy, for even the most depraved desire it also. But he that will investigate this fame wisely and earnestly, will perceive how little it is, how precarious, how frail, how bereft it is of all that is good. Glory of this world! Why do foolish men with a false voice call thee glory? Thou art not so. More men have pomp and glory and worship from the

opinion of foolish people, than they have from their own works."

**Alfred as a Reformer.**—We have spoken quite fully of Alfred as a warrior and man of religious principles. He was also a reformer, especially in the jurisprudence of his kingdom.

In reforming the law courts, Alfred found that there was need for a thorough re-organization of the whole judicial system. Having a strong reverence for what had already been established, he preserved the old so far as possible, and then carefully laid out new ground.

It would not be interesting to the average reader to give in detail the particulars of the courts Alfred established, or reformed. But we note, for example, that he established as a chief court, in each of his shires, what was known as the Shire-moot, or Shire-court. Over this the chief, or ealdorman, of the shire presided. He stood next to the King in authority in the shire, and was judge, adviser to the King and executive. The name ealdorman signifies elder man, and implies that he was a person of mature years. Usually, in presiding at the Shire-moot, he associated with him the bishop. We do not read that there was an appeal from the ealdorman, but it is certain that Alfred reprov'd such judges as were unjust or ignorant. The ealdorman was also the military leader in the shire. Next to the ealdorman stood the sheriff (the shire-reeve, or, in Saxon, *scir-gerefa*). He was the deputy of the ealdorman, and the fiscal officer of the district, and was appointed and removed by the king. In forty-five

towns there was also the borough-reeve (*burh-geréfa*), and there were still lower judicial officers. He also established the Courts of Tything, three of which were created in each county, the Courts-leet, etc.

It will interest anyone to know how carefully he worked out the system of suretyship in criminal matters. Every Englishman was required to belong to a hundred, tything, or guild, and, if not, he was held to be an outlaw, whose life and property were at the mercy of anybody. Every householder had to keep "household rolls" of his servants. Should a crime be committed within the tything the head-borough, who was the chief man of the tything, had to produce the criminal. He was given a certain number of days to produce him for trial. The head-borough, with two other leading men, might get the head-borough and two leading men each of the three neighboring tythings—twelve men in all—to swear that in their conscience the tything was innocent of any knowledge of the crime or of the flight. Thereupon the first named tything was cleared; otherwise it had to pay the fine awarded by law. Oaths were also to be made by every member of the tything that he would bring the criminal to trial wherever he might find him. The same thing applied to the guilds, which were the people of the cities. For the state of society then existing this was a most remarkable code of criminal law, and probably the most effective in its results that the world has ever seen.

A writer has well said: "This mutual liabili-

ty, or suretyship, was the pivot of all Alfred's administrative reforms. It was an old system known by the common name of frank-pledge, but now new life was put into it by the King, and in a short time it worked a very remarkable change in the whole of his kingdom. Merchants and others could go about their affairs without guards of armed men. The forests were emptied of their outlaws, kinless men and Danes, and left to the neat-herds and swine-herds, and their charges."

In the matter of transferring estates, the Saxons had a simple method, greatly in contrast with the complex system which grew up in England in later centuries, when scriveners made their living from the number of folios embraced in title-deeds. The delivery of the key of a door gave one the right to possess the dwelling. A turf cut from the sward, and handed over to the purchaser by the vendor, was a conveyance of the land, just as much as if there had been a recorded title-deed. Of course these formalities took place in the presence of witnesses; and so strong was the regard for law, even while conducted so simply, that no necessity arose for Courts of Equity to construe contracts.

It was reported in after years that in Alfred's day women could travel from one end of the kingdom to the other without fear of insult; that "if a wayfarer left his money all night on the highway he might come next day and be sure of finding it untouched;" that "the King himself tried the experiment of hanging up gold bracelets at cross-roads, and no man wished, or dared, to lay hands



on them," etc. But while these were rather imaginary tales, it is certain that Alfred converted the whole race of the West Saxons from a semi-barbarous people into law-abiding citizens. If all his reforms were not so thorough, this, of just laws and the certain execution of them, was at least extraordinary in both its temporary and permanent results.

It is to be remembered that in Alfred's Code of laws "two main principles guided the law-giver: first, that justice should be provided for everyone, high and low, rich and poor; next that the Christian religion should be recognized as containing the law of God, which must be the basis of all laws." No higher basic principles than these could be employed by any modern lawgiver.

It has been assumed by some writers, because of the great parallels between the Code of Alfred and the Mosaic law, that he endeavored to govern in all details, so far as practicable, just as Moses governed the Israelites. But this was not the case. He did begin his Code by practically reciting the Ten Commandments, but he also added the precept of Matthew, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." He recognized the transition from old to new, which we trace to the time when Jesus was born in Judea, for Alfred's jurisprudence, while severe in its main features, necessarily made so by conditions of society in his day, was illumined by the spirit of charity and mercy.

**Alfred's Personal Appearance.**—While almost nothing is known of the details of Alfred's person-

al appearance, the following by Sir Walter Besant conveys as much intelligence or tradition as may be gleaned from early sources: "I take him to have been a man of good stature and strong build; a man whose appearance was kingly; who impressed his followers with the gallant and confident carriage of a brave soldier. But as to his face, or the color of his hair or eyes, I can tell nothing. Fair hair he had, I think, and blue eyes: or the more common type of brown hair and gray eyes. When a king resigns all personal ambitions and seeks nothing for himself, it seems natural and fitting that, while his works live after him, he himself should vanish without leaving so much as a tradition of his face or figure." The sculptor-artist, Thornycroft, has succeeded in his colossal figure, which dominates the lower part of High street in Winchester, in representing Alfred as a majestic warrior, in helmet and cloak, his right hand uplifted, raising the hilt of the sword, which is also the sign of the Cross. In his left hand, by his side, is a shield. The face is an imaginary one, but strong in character, stern, yet full of repose.\*

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## CHAPTER VI

### Alfred as an Author

**His Love for Learning.**—We delight to know that, with all his diverse occupations as warrior

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\* A photograph of it is reproduced as the frontispiece to this volume.

and king, Alfred had time, or took time, to study and to write. This he did because of his great love for learning. And it is not surprising, from his general character, that his tastes were altogether for religious and useful books. The busiest of men in affairs of state, he set aside, whenever practicable, some portion of every day to make the Saxon language (or Anglo-Saxon, as it began to be called in his day), the purveyor of great thoughts to his countrymen. When he came to the throne the only books in his kingdom were in Latin, and this language was not understood by the people, nor even by the priests. Alfred himself declared that he scarcely knew of a single priest who understood the common Latin prayers, or could translate a sentence of them into English. It was high time something was done, and he set about to do it. There were treasures locked up in Latin books, but, as his countrymen could not understand them, and they were for the most part inaccessible, he determined to rectify the evil by his own learning.

Asser, who was much with the King after the year 885, gives a charming account of how Alfred began to perform literary work. "On a certain day," said he (it was in 887 or 888), "we were both sitting in the King's chamber, talking on all kinds of subjects as usual, and it happened that I read to him a quotation out of a certain book. He heard it attentively with both his ears, and addressed me with a thoughtful mind, showing me at the same moment a book which he carried in his bosom, wherein the daily courses, and

Psalms, and prayers which he had read in his youth were written, and he commanded me to write the same quotation in that book. Hearing this and perceiving his ingenuous benevolence, and devout desire of studying the words of Divine wisdom, I gave, though in secret, boundless thanks to Almighty God, who had implanted such a love of wisdom in the King's heart. But I could not find any empty space in that book wherein to write the quotation, for it was already full of various matters; wherefore I made a little delay, principally that I might stir up the bright intellect of the King to higher acquaintance with the Divine testimonies. Upon his urging me to make haste and write it quickly, I said to him, 'Are you willing that I should write that quotation on some leaf apart? For it is not certain whether we shall not find one or more other such extracts which will please you; and if that should so happen, we shall be glad that we have kept them apart.' 'Your plan is good,' said he; and I gladly made haste to get ready a sheet, in the beginning of which I wrote what he bade me; and on that same day I wrote therein, as I had anticipated, no less than three other quotations which pleased him; and from that time we daily talked together, and found out other quotations which pleased him; so that the sheet became full, and deservedly so; according as it is written, 'The just man builds upon a moderate foundation, and by degrees passes to greater things.' Thus, like a most productive bee, he flew here and there, asking questions as he went, until he had eagerly and unceasingly collected many

various flowers of Divine Scripture with which he thickly stored the cells of his mind. Now, when that first quotation was copied, he was eager at once to read, and to interpret in Saxon, and then to teach others. The King, inspired by God, began to study the rudiments of Divine Scripture on the sacred solemnity of St. Martin (Nov. 11), and he continued to learn the flowers collected by certain masters, and to reduce them into the form of one book, as he was then able, although mixed one with another, until it became almost as large as a psalter. This book he called his *Enchiridion*, or 'Manual,' because he carefully kept it at hand day and night, and found, as he told me, no small consolation therein." This "Manual" is, unfortunately, lost.

Alfred started upon his new mission by not only becoming author himself, but by gathering around him a select coterie of learned men. He sent abroad for ecclesiastics and teachers, and built monasteries and schools, where they could continue the studies which he directed them to perform, and also to teach. The common belief that Alfred founded schools in Oxford which were the basis for the present great universities, has not been fully established in history, but it is certain that he founded there the first mint, where were made the coins of the realm. As has been stated, he found Asser, the learned monk of St. David's, in Wales, and put him into service at his court. Asser subsequently repaid this act by becoming Alfred's first biographer during Alfred's life-time, writing his *Annals* in 893, though it was

not completed and not published till after his death. He brought Plegmund from Mercia and gave him the See of Canterbury. He advised with Werfrith, bishop of Winchester, a truly learned man. He sent abroad for Grimbold and also for John of Saxony. These were but a few of the many scholars with which he surrounded his court.

As the Venerable Bede (673-735), the luminous and great ecclesiastical writer and historian of Wearmouth, had been dead for nearly two centuries, he could not call him in person to his aid, although had Bede lived in his day it is more than probable he would have been one of the most acceptable helpers to Alfred in carrying forward the new plan of giving to the people of England the best literature known to exist. But Bede's own work, then well-known, written in Latin, called his *Ecclesiastical History*, and intended to show what had been God's dealings with His church in England, from the time when Pope Gregory introduced Christianity into Britain to Bede's day, was considered the masterpiece on that subject; in fact, was the only authentic history of the church in Britain during the period of which it treated. This work of Bede King Alfred determined to translate himself.

His "History of the World".—But before taking this in hand, Alfred decided to translate, first, a well-known history of the whole world prepared nearly five hundred years before by Orosius. Orosius was a priest of Spain, who had visited St. Augustine, when that "Father of the Latin

Church" was writing his *City of God*. At Augustine's request Orosius wrote his *Histories*, "from the beginning of the world to his own day," (about 412).

Singularly enough this work had remained to the Ninth Century, and it continued to be until the Sixteenth Century, the only recognized authoritative manual of the world's history. Alfred took it, found it rather difficult reading, but translated it and made it easy of comprehension. It was a tremendous task for an initial work of a new author, but Alfred was equal to almost any task, and by abridgment, by paraphrase, and by enlargement at discretion, the result was a translation that no one else in England but Alfred could have done so well.

In this translation of Orosius, the short summary of geographical knowledge known to that writer was made invaluable by the additions which Alfred made to it at first hand, from travelers in foreign countries and from northern navigators. On the authority of these navigators he tells, as Charles Knight (1791-1873) in his *Popular History of England* says, of the "waste land which the Finns inhabit, obtaining a precarious subsistence by hunting and fishing; of wealthy men, whose possessions consisted of reindeer; of seas where the walrus and the whale were in abundance; of Eastland and the Esthonians, where there are many towns, and where the rich drank mare's milk, and the poor and the slaves drank mead. He describes the coasts of Scandinavia with singular precision. How true all this is we

know at the present day. The royal teacher published no wild stories, such as are found in other Saxon writers who came after him, of people with dogs' heads, boars' tusks, and horses' manes; of headless giants, or those with two faces on one head. Truth was, in itself, as it always will be, the best foundation for interesting narrative."

Sir Clements Markham, K. C. B., president of the Royal Geographical Society of England, well says concerning Alfred's literary labors in the cause of geography in his translating and enlarging Orosius: "There have been literary sovereigns since the days of Timæus, of Sicily, writing for their own glory, or for their own education or amusement. But Alfred alone wrote with the sole object of his people's good; while in his methods, in his scientific accuracy and in his aims he was several centuries in advance of his time."

It may be said that in Alfred's day the Saxons had no geographical information whatever outside of the limited area of their own territory and other portions of England. Alfred, not only for his own sake, but to correct this ignorance, set down in writing, besides the information which Orosius furnished, that which he himself derived from all other accessible sources. This is what makes his translation of Orosius so interesting even now. It throws light upon nearly all of Ninth Century Europe.

**His "Bede" and "Boethius."**—The work of Bede came next in order. This was almost the history of England, though intended to be a history, only, of the conversion of the Angles and



Saxons and of the earliest ecclesiastical institutions of Britain. Speaking of its relation to the English Church, Professor John Earle, of Oxford, says that "no other national church possesses a history of equal merit."

Another work taken in hand by Alfred was a translation of the *Consolations of Philosophy*, written by Boethius, about 522. "A golden book, not unworthy the leisure of Plato or Tully," said Gibbon. It was not unworthy the leisure of Alfred, and since his day the great poet Chaucer, and also England's famous queen Elizabeth, labored on translations of it. Boethius was a Roman senator, learned and religious. His *Consolations* was in the form of a dialogue between himself and Wisdom. The burden of his work was, "That every fortune is good for men, whether it seemed good to them or evil, and that we ought with all our power to inquire after God, every man according to the measure of his understanding." The beginning of this translation, according to the copy which has come down to us (although perhaps done by a later hand than Alfred's) is as follows: "King Alfred was translator of this book and turned it from book Latin into English as it is now done. Sometimes he set word by word, sometimes meaning by meaning, as he the most plainly and most clearly could explain it, for the various and manifold wordly occupations which often busied him both in mind and in body. . . . And he now prays, and for God's name implores, everyone of those who list to read this book, that he would pray for him, and not blame

him, if he more rightly understand it than he could."

**His Other Works.**—He also translated Pope Gregory's *Pastoral Care*, which is a guide-book for the use of the priests. It was the first religious manual of his time. In his introduction to this translation King Alfred wrote: "When I then called to mind how the learning of the Latin tongue before this was fallen away throughout the English race, though many knew how to read writing in English; then began I, among other unlike and manifold businesses of this kingdom, to turn into English the book that is named in Latin, *Pastoralis*, and in English the *Hind's Book*, one while word for word, another-while meaning for meaning, so far as I learned it with Plegmund, my archbishop, and with Asser my bishop, and with Grimbald, my mass-priest, and with John, my mass-priest. After I had then learned them, so that I understood them, and so that I might read them with the fullest comprehension, I turned them into English, and to each bishop's see in my kingdom will I send one and on each is an æstel" (perhaps a clasp on the book; perhaps a metal marker) "that is of the value of fifty mancuses, and I bid, in God's name, that no man undo the æstel from the books, nor the books from the minister. It is unknown how long there may be so learned bishops as now, thank God, are everywhere."

There are copies of these original translations in several public libraries in England; one can be seen under glass by any visitor to the Bodleian Li-

brary in Oxford. While the book is not consulted to-day, the King evidently thought it was of the highest value.

Another book which, from a religious point of view, is probably the most instructive of Alfred's works, is his *Soliloquies of St. Augustine*. Augustine, when bishop of Carthage, wrote his *Soliloquies*, and these are gathered out of that work, but with various intensely suggestive reflections by the royal author himself.

At some time during his years of peace he edited (and may, probably, have written all there is in that work concerning his own reign) the *Saxon Chronicles*, the best authority of to-day on Saxon history in England.

The last work which certainly can be attributed to Alfred is known as his *Proverbs*. The compilation now extant is later than his time, as each proverb, or paragraph, begins with: "Thus quoth Alfred, England's comfort," or, "England's darling," etc. It is supposed that he wrote or spoke the most of them, and they are such a reflection of his known state of mind that they were, probably, correctly handed down to the succeeding generation by some writer by whom they were compiled. Here is one:

Thus quoth Alfred, England's comfort: the Earl

And the Atheling are under the king,

To govern the land according to law:

The priest and the knight must both alike judge uprightly;

For as a man sows

So shall he reap,

And every man's judgment comes home to him to his own doors."

Various other original and translated writings are attributed to Alfred, some no doubt genuine and some spurious; among them is a book of martyrs, *Aesop's Fables*, and a *Treatise on Falconry*. In the Ely Cathedral is an old MSS., which states that he translated the whole of the Old and New Testaments into Saxon, but it is generally believed that his labors in this direction extended only to the Psalms, and that he was at work on these when he died.

Alfred was fond of poetry. He collected all the current poetry based on traditions and legends brought from the forests of Germany. He delighted in old Saxon songs, taught them to his children, and had them sung at court. It is only a tradition that he sang them to the music of his own harp, but we can well believe that this was so. If he did not write songs himself, he at least cherished and loved them, and perpetuated them in the literature which he fostered.

In reference to all these diverse works, it is not to be claimed for Alfred that he was a great original author; he had neither the time nor the inspiration of high genius to become one of the "immortal few." But he believed in education, possessed it himself in a remarkable degree for one of his time, and became England's greatest medium, in his day, for its dissemination. He did what his hand and mind found to do, and he did it magnificently.

Professor Earle, of Oxford, well says:

"In our time when books are freely produced in great abundance, it is hard to appreciate the

power and originality of King Alfred's work in the field of literature. When we look about for his motives we find such as these: need of occasional retirement and solace in the midst of harassing affairs, desire for personal improvement and edification, strong intellectual appetites, etc.—but all these controlled by one chief and dominant purpose, that of national education. Looking at the external aspect of the king's situation we might have judged it sufficient for him at that time to concentrate his energies upon the restoration of material prosperity and the strengthening of the national armaments. That the prior necessity of these was not overlooked, we have ample proof in the subsequent progress of Wessex. But this did not satisfy the kingly ambition of Alfred; he craved for his people the higher benefits of political life, their moral and intellectual and spiritual development. Curiosity may well prick us to ask from what source far-reaching aims like these so suddenly burst into our history, and that, too, at a time of exhaustion at home and apprehension from abroad. If King Alfred saw a connection between general education and the acquisition of wealth (as there is some indication that he did), this may partly explain the energy of his educational policy, but we still desiderate something more. If we might assume that being under a strong sense of what he had himself gained by his early education, he desired to impart the like advantages to his people, then and only then the problem would find its appropriate and adequate solution. The beginning of modern education

in the Seventh Century were quickened with the sense that something had been lost, and the whole movement was colored with the sentiment of retrieval and recovery. Two great historical exhibitions of this effort are displayed in the Latin schools of Anglia and of Charlemagne, which are in fact but two parts of one movement, linked together by the name of Alcuin. King Alfred's educational revival is isolated from the proceeding by the wars and desolations of the Wicingas, and it starts with a new basis in the installation of the mother tongue as the medium of elementary teaching. To this innovation it is due that we alone of all European nations have a fine vernacular literature in the Ninth and Tenth and Eleventh Centuries. And the domestic culture of that era, I take it, was the cause why the great French immigration which followed in the wake of the Norman Conquest did not finally swamp the English language."

**His Code of Laws.**—In addition to all the foregoing more strictly literary work, as if this were not enough for one royal author in his few years of quiet, Alfred compiled the laws of his time, and this work still goes by the name of *Alfred's Laws*, or *Code*. The law code in use in his day was that of King Ina (d. 726). Alfred continued the major part of these laws, but reformed them. In a Prologue to the work he says: "I, Alfred the King, gathered these together and ordered many to be written which our forefathers held, such as I approved, and many which I approved not I rejected, and had other ordinances enacted with the

counsel of my Witan: for I dared not venture to set much of my own upon the statute book, for I knew not what might be approved by those who should come after us. But such ordinances as I found, either in the time of my kinsman Ina, or of Offa, King of the Mercians, or of Ethelbert, who first received baptism in England—such as seemed to me rightest I have collected here, and the rest I have let drop.”

**The Father of English Prose.**—Before Alfred there was no Anglo-Saxon prose. The England of the earlier Ninth Century had no books in the mother-tongue worthy of mention. In consequence of Alfred’s devotion to literature, there began a Renaissance of learning which set a distinct glory on the centuries immediately succeeding. Alfred laments the desuetude into which English literature had fallen in these words:

“Our ancestors, who were the masters of these sacred places, they loved wisdom, and by means of it they acquired wealth and left it to us. Here may yet be seen their traces, but we are not able to walk in their steps, forasmuch as we have now lost both the wealth and the wisdom, because we were not willing to bend our minds to that pursuit.” By the Eleventh Century real English had become solid and enduring speech.

Alfred’s books form one of his most enduring monuments. His character stands revealed in luminous fullness and faultlessness on their every page. Selecting the best religious, historical and philosophical writings extant in his time—all of them, or nearly all, in Latin—he made them over

into the speech of his people, and under his clear mind and quaint style they were rebourneoned into beauty. Amid great pressure of public business he still took time, as did Gladstone after him, to study out the most intricate problems connected with morals, duty, civic themes, the human soul and its destiny, and, after mastering them, gave them to the world in new colorings. No king before him, no king after him, did more than Alfred for the human race. Greater praise than this it is unnecessary to give, less praise would not be his due.

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## CHAPTER VII

### Comments by Historians

**What Others Have Said of Alfred.**—Florence monk of Worcester, who died in 1118, and who wrote in his life-time a *Chronicle* of the kingdom thus spoke of Alfred: "That famous, warlike, victorious king, the zealous protector of widows scholars, orphans and the poor; skilled in the Saxon poets; affable and liberal to all; endowed with prudence, fortitude, justice and temperance; most patient under the infirmity which he daily suffered; a most stern inquisitor in executing justice vigilant and devoted in the service of God." No better eulogy has followed since, though it was but the beginning of tributes from historians and poets, which have never ceased since Florence's day.

Asser, writing in 893 (in Alfred's life-time



in his *Annals of the Reign of Alfred the Great*, speaking of him as having little support in his great undertaking by the generation among which he lived, says: "He alone, sustained by the Divine aid, like a skilful pilot, strove to steer his ship, laden with much wealth, into the safe and much desired harbor of his country, though almost all his crew were tired, and suffered them not to faint."

Fabius Ethelwerd (d. 998?) in his *Chronicle*, refers to Alfred as "that immovable pillar of the Western Saxons, that man full of justice, bold in arms, learned in speech, and, above all other things, imbued with the Divine instructions."

Said Sir Henry Spelman (1562-1641): "The wonder and astonishment of all ages! If we reflect on his piety and religion, it would seem that he had always lived in a cloister; if on his warlike exploits, that he had never been out of camps; if on his learning and writings, that he had spent his whole life in college; if on his wholesome laws and wise administration, that these had been his whole study and employment."

Thomas Fuller (1608-'61) in his work, *The Worthies of England*, said: "He left learning where he had found ignorance; justice where he found oppression; peace where he found distraction. . . . He loved religion more than superstition."

David Hume (1711-'76) in *The History of England*, speaks of Alfred as "the model of that perfect character which, under the domination of a sage or wise man, philosophers have

been fond of delineating, rather as a fiction of their imagination than in hopes of ever seeing it really existing."

Edward A. Freeman (1823-'92), in his charming *History of the Norman Conquest*, felt free to say: "Alfred . . . is the most perfect character in history. He is a singular instance of a prince who has become a hero of romance, who, as such, has had countless imaginary exploits attributed to him, but to whose character romance has done no more harm than justice. . . . No other man on record has ever so thoroughly united all the virtues, both of the ruler and of the private man. In no other man on record were so many virtues disfigured by so little alloy. A saint without superstition, a scholar without ostentation, a warrior all whose wars were fought in the defence of his country, a conqueror whose laurels were never stained by cruelty, a prince never cast down by adversity, never lifted up to insolence in the day of triumph—there is no other name in history to compare with his."

"It is no easy task for anyone who has been studying his life and works," said Thomas Hughes (1823-'96), the author of *Tom Brown's School Days*, "to set reasonable bounds to their reverence and enthusiasm for the man."

"Alfred's name," says Frederic Harrison, one of the most gifted of living Englishmen, "is almost the only one in the long roll of our national worthies which awakens no bitter, no jealous thought; which combines the honor of all. Alfred represents at once the ancient monarchy, the

army, the navy, the law, the literature, the poetry, the art, the enterprise, the industry, the religion of our race. Neither Welshman, nor Scot, nor Irishman, can feel that Alfred's memory has left the trace of a wound for his national pride. No difference of church arises to separate any who would join to do Alfred honor. No saint in the calendar was a more loyal and cherished member of the ancient faith; and yet no Protestant can imagine a purer and more simple follower of the Gospel. Alfred was a victorious warrior whose victories left no curses behind them: a king whom no man ever charged with a harsh act: a scholar who never became a pedant: a saint who knew no superstition: a hero as bold as Launcelot—as spotless as Galahad. No people, in ancient or modern times, ever had a hero-founder at once so truly historic, so venerable, and so supremely great. Alfred was more to us than the heroes in antique myths—more than Theseus and Solon were to Athens, or Lycurgus to Sparta, or Romulus and Numa were to Rome; more than St. Stephen was to Hungary, or Pelayo and the Cid to Spain; more than Hugh Capet and Jeanne d'Arc were to France; more than William the Silent was to Holland; nay, almost as much as the Great Charles was to the Franks." And again: "Of all the names in history there is only our English Alfred whose record is without stain and without weakness; who is equally amongst the greatest of men in genius, in magnanimity, in valor, in moral purity, in intellectual force, in practical wisdom and in beauty of soul. In his recorded career

from infancy to death, we can find no single trait that is not noble and suggestive, nor a single act or word that can be counted as a flaw."

John Richard Green (1837-'83), whose *History of the English People* has proved such charming reading to the preceding and present generation of readers and will not be superseded in our time, remarked of Alfred: "Of the narrowness, of the want of proportion, of the predominance of one quality over another which goes commonly with an intensity of moral purpose, Alfred showed not a trace. Scholar and soldier, artist and man of business, poet and saint, his character kept that perfect balance which charms us in no other English man save Shakespeare. . . . Little by little men came to know what such a life of worthiness meant. Little by little they came to recognize in Alfred a ruler of higher and nobler stamp than the world had seen. Never had it seen a king who lived solely for the good of his people. Never had it seen a ruler who set aside every personal aim to devote himself solely to the welfare of those whom he ruled. It was this grand self-mastery that gave him his power over the men about him."

A more minute historian than Green, and one of the most popular of writers on English history, Charles Knight (1791-1873), in his *Popular History of England*, declared that "The character of one ruler never more completely influenced the destinies of his country. Alfred saved England from foreign domination. He raised her in the scale of nations and maintained her in the fellow-

ship of Christian communities. . . . Alfred saved his own race from destruction; and whatever may be the after-fortune of that race, the indomitable courage, the religious endurance, the heart and hope of this man under every trial, constituted a precious bequest to his crown and to the nation."

Says Sir Walter Besant in a volume on *Alfred the Great*, published in 1899 as a memorial volume, to commemorate the one thousandth anniversary of King Alfred's death, which was then approaching: "From time to time in history—generally in some time of great doubt and trouble: or in some time when the old ideals are in danger of being forgotten: or in some time when the nation seems losing the sense of duty and of responsibility—there appears one, man or woman, who restores the better spirit of the people by his example, by his preaching, by his self-sacrifice, by his martyrdom. He is the prophet as priest, the prophet as king, the prophet as law-giver. There passes before us a splendid procession of men and women who have thus restored a nation or raised the fallen ideals, among whom we recognize many faces. There are Savonarola; Francis of Assisi; Joan of Arc; our own Queen Elizabeth, greatest and strongest of all women; the Czar Peter. But the greatest figure of them all—the most noble, the most god-like—is that of the Ninth Century Alfred, King of that little country which you have upon your map. There is none like Alfred in the whole page of history: none with a record altogether so blameless: none

so wise: none so human. I like to think that the face of the Anglo-Saxon at his best and noblest is the face of Alfred. I am quite sure and certain that the mind of the Anglo-Saxon at his best and noblest is the mind of Alfred: that the aspirations, the hopes, the standards of the Anglo-Saxon at his best and noblest are the aspirations, the hopes, the standards of Alfred. He is truly our Leader, our Founder, our King."

A few among many others may be quoted in conclusion: Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) in *A Philosophy of the History of Mankind*: "A pattern for kings in a time of extremity, a bright star in the history of mankind." Samuel T. Coleridge (1772-1834): "One of the most august characters that our age has produced." Johann Martin Lappenberg (1794-1865): "Greater and better earned glory has never been attached to the memory of any chieftain than that which encircles the name of Alfred." Tennyson (1809-'92): "Truth-teller was our England's Alfred named." Charles Dickens (1812-'70): "The greatest character among the nations of the earth." Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886): "One of the greatest figures in the history of the world." J. A. Giles (1808-1884): "To praise such a man is to gild the rainbow or paint the lily."

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## NOTES ON THE TEXT.

<sup>1</sup>Page 7. "Ealdormen" eldersmen, or earl's men; the rulers among the Angles, Saxons and other Teutonic nations. They preceded their kings, which were not, in title or office, an existing reality until these peoples, in England, found it necessary to elect some one to govern who would have more authority than the earl's man, or chief public citizen. The name survives in the English earl of the present day.

<sup>2</sup>Page 9. A subsequent volume of this "Library" will give an account of all that is known of the Druids and of Druidism.

<sup>3</sup>Page 9. After about A. D. 296, the term "painted men" (*picti*, or *Picts*), came to be applied to Britons in the far north (Scotland), who continued to paint, while the Britons in Roman England did not. In 360, when the inhabitants of Ireland came to be known to the Romans also as "painted men," the term *Scotti*, or *Scots*, was applied to them, it being a Celtic word of nearly the same meaning as "Picti." See Rhys's *Celtic Britain*, page 239.

<sup>4</sup>Page 11. For an interesting discussion of the use and meanings of the word Britain and kindred derivatives, which, however, comes to no satisfactory conclusion, see Rhys's *Celtic Britain*, chap. VI.

<sup>5</sup>Page 12. See an interesting article on "Cornish Antiquities," by Max Muller, in *Chips from a German Workshop*, Vol. 3, p. 238. Irish, Gaelic

and Welsh, as spoken to-day, are, of course, "descendants" of early Britain languages.

<sup>6</sup>Page 14. It would seem as if the entry of the Angles was, practically, of all that people, because they do not figure subsequently in the Low Country history. The Jutes probably continued in possession of "Juteland," (now called Jutland, to be found on any modern map of Denmark). The Saxons, as Germans, continued their national history.

<sup>7</sup>Page 16. Hengest and Horsa, who were ealdormen, were probably not Saxons, but Jutes, and arrived about 449. They landed, with boats and a large company, on the island of Thanet, at a spot now called Ebbsfleet—just near Ramsgate, on the extreme east point of England. They remained, like others after them, to settle in the country, which was rich in fertility and of a better climate than their own.

<sup>8</sup>Page 20. The names of all this royal family, from Ethelwulf to Alfred, were spelled in the Anglo-Saxon MSS, with a diphthong (Æthelwulf, Ælfred, etc.) and this spelling has been retained by many historians, like Green, Freeman and others, but is modernized by most scholars of the present day.

<sup>9</sup>Page 20. It is Asser, the monk, who gives Alfred's birth as 849 in his "Life of Alfred," and that has been accepted as the date ever since. Some historians believe that he was born seven years earlier, in which case his first journey to Rome was made when he was eleven years of age.

<sup>10</sup>Page 23. "Norman" is a corruption of



Northman, or Norseman. All the Northmen were called Normans by the Germans and French; in England they were usually called Danes. After the Northmen had acquired a portion of northern France, and that territory was called Normandy (in 912), the people who came from that territory were termed Normans by the English, and the designation was applied to them thereafter.

<sup>11</sup>Page 26. Athelstan is often called in history a "son" of Ethelwulf, but no statement that he had such a son is in any reliable document relating to that king's family. Charles Plummer, in his recent *Life and Times of Alfred*, thinks he was a brother of Ethelwulf, and such may have been the case.

<sup>12</sup>Page 36. For a full account of this "White Horse," see the author's *Bright Days in Merrie England*, pp. 203-206.

<sup>13</sup>Page 39. Some historians believe that it is a mistake to suppose Alfred purchased this peace with money. For example, Thomas Hughes, who says in his *Life of Alfred the Great*, p. 84: "I can find no authority for believing that Alfred fell into the fatal and humiliating mistake of either paying them anything, or giving hostages, or promising tribute." He thinks, instead, that the Danes "quit," for the time, being afraid of him. But most authorities hold the opposite, and aver that it was good statecraft.

<sup>14</sup>Page 46. John Richard Green in his *Making of England*, thinks that the Treaty which exists under the name of the "Treaty of Wedmore" was one executed at a later date, when there was

a second treaty made with Guthrum, but in any event the document is genuine.

<sup>15</sup>Page 48. "Bookland" was land that was held by evidence in writing free from any service, fief, or fee, and was distinguished from "folkland," which was held at the pleasure of the lord.

<sup>16</sup>Page 53. "Hundred" was used to designate a hundred families. Ten families made a town, or tithing, and ten tithings made a hundred. "Shire" was equivalent to county.

<sup>17</sup>Page 59. Charles Plummer, in his *Life and Times of Alfred*, suggests that the date of Alfred death was one year earlier, October 26, 900, and Frederic Harrison is of the same opinion.

## BEST WORKS IN ENGLISH ON ALFRED THE GREAT.

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Plummer, Charles. "Life and Times of Alfred the Great." Oxford, 1902.

Tappan, E. M. "Days of Alfred the Great." 1900.

Jeffery, Frederic V. "A Perfect Prince." London, 1901.

Conybeare, Edward. "Alfred in the Chronicles." London, 1899.

Draper, Warwick H. "Alfred the Great." London, 1901.

Hawkins, W., and Smith, E. T. "The Story of Alfred the Great." London, 1900.

## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE.

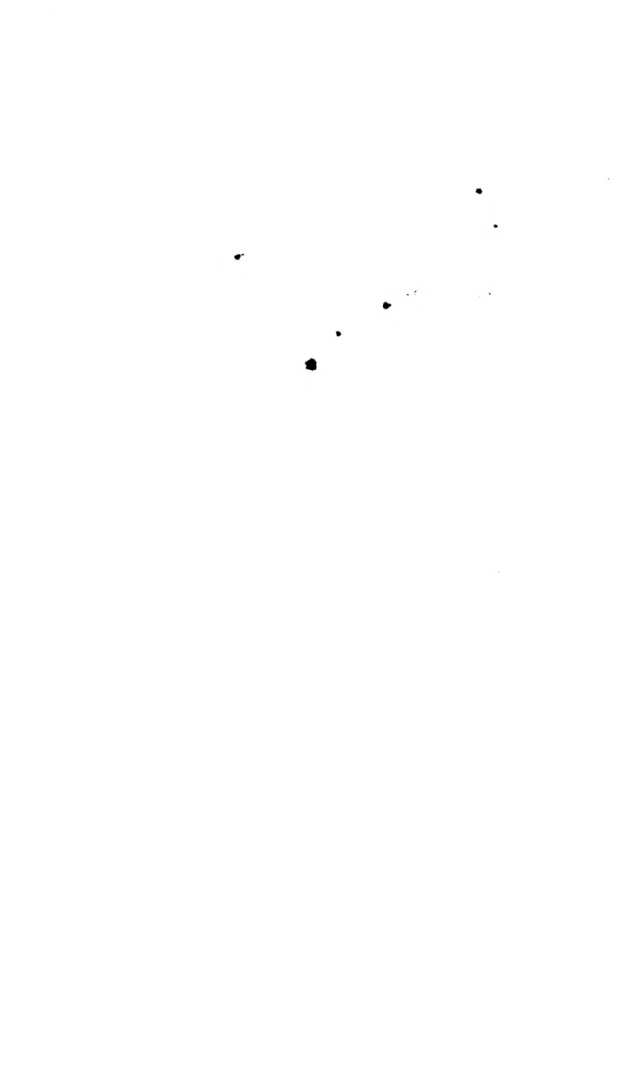
Born .....	(probably)	849
Sent to Rome.....		853
Again goes to Rome.....		855
Returns to England.....		856
Assists Burhred of Mercia against Danes...		868
Marries Elswitha .....		869
Defeats Danes at Ashdown.....		871
Succeeds Ethelred as King... (after Easter)		871
Defeats Danes at Wilton..... (summer of)		871
After nine pitched battles, makes peace.....		
	(late in)	871
Builds fleet and defeats Danes at sea.....		875
Defeats Danes at sea.....		877
Retires to Isle of Athelney..... (Jan.),		878
Musters new army near Selwood Forest....		
	(May),	878
Defeats Danes at Ethandun (Eddington)..		
	(May),	878
Makes peace near River Avon..... (May),		878
Is godfather to King Guthrum.... (July),		878
Again defeats Danes at sea.....		882
Sends assistance to Christians in India.....		882
Again scatters Danish fleet.....		885
Rebuilds and refortifies London.....		886
Introduces trial by jury.....		886
Begins his translations of Latin into Anglo-		
Saxon .....		888
Campaigns against Hastings.....	893-	897
Destroys fleet of 20 Viking vessels.....		897
Does most of his literary work.....	897 to death	
Dies .....	Oct. 26, (900 or)	901

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